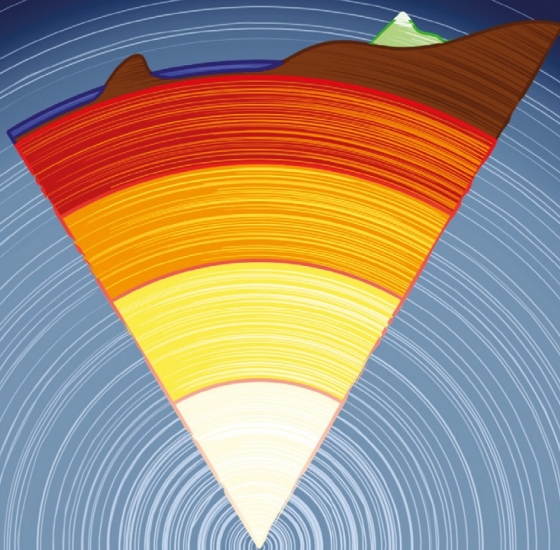


A HAIR'S BREADTH

A Leap Beyond Chance



Lotten Säfström

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Characters, events and incidents are creations of the author's imagination.
Any resemblance to real people or incidents are coincidental.
The author is allowed to mention the real people whose names appear in the plot.

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eBook by Salto De Vita
ISBN: 978-91-983173-4-3

Published by Salto De Vita, 2020

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Acknowledgements

This book could only have been written with the support of

Suzannah Young,

Loke Säfström,

Kerriane Orriss,

Lena and Martin's Tenerife Trekking,

Ina Wihlborg,

Jenny Bäfving,

my fellow travellers,

friends

and

my family.

R.W.J.

On the road again

Dedicated to Loke, Arild and Axel

How the spark to write this book was ignited

It was a bright afternoon in spring and we were together in the kitchen, my son and I. I asked the usual questions about if he had eaten, what had happened in school, if he had any homework. His answers were uncharacteristically short and he seemed numbed. I sat down opposite him at the kitchen table and pried a bit deeper:

“Anything happened at school today? You know you can tell me.”

He took a deep breath, as if he was breathing in strength. Then, also very much out of character, he spoke but with his eyes were glued to the table top instead of looking into mine:

“How could you leave this to us?” His anger and resentment was undisguised. I was taken by surprise. This was not how I was used to us communicating. I saw the first tears welling over the brim of his eye lashes. They fell from his face. He lifted his chin and stared, not looked, at me:

“You and your generation, and even your parents, knew how this would play out and you did nothing!” I heard the shattering sincerity of his tone, a tone I had seldom, if ever, heard from my child before.

“How dare you tell us that *we* have to fix this?! We are children! This has have to have been your responsibility. Do you even realize that it's too late? That the Earth is being damaged beyond its ability to repair itself! Maybe I won't grow old, mum! Do you realise?”

The only excuse which was now whirling in my head was that I'd been preoccupied with so much - my life span slipped by, so insignificant now, in the light of *this*. My next thoughts were that I have to do something, I will keep recycling, I will do anything and everything within my power. From now on. And I will try to write a book. Trying to make a difference.

That is how this book got its first kindling. The year was 2014. My child was 13 years old and his anguish for his world is still too terrible for me to be able to fathom. His reality, the reality for all

others of these younger generations – our reality and our future.

I am taking these young people's suffering to heart. I am taking my world's future seriously. I keep doing everything I possibly can to grow up and act as a responsible adult. Seriously.

Gratitude

In an effort to tell a tale of a brighter tomorrow,

I want to share this story with you.

It is a tale that, early on, sprouted from an idea of a sacrifice over 1000 days.

Every single of those one thousand days

would turn out to be the making of billions of people,

transformed into the revered heroes of that bright tomorrow.

A sacrifice stunningly not turning out to be a sacrifice after all,

but a gift, especially in terms of personal growth.

A realization reached by most of us billions of humans

about the truth of our astoundingly bountiful Earth's potential.

A stretch of a mere 1000 days bringing us all into unfathomed maturity and joy.

I hope you will enjoy this tale of an ultimate leap taken beyond chance.

Determinedly brought about by the best version of us as Homo Sapiens.

This feat that had brought about change to our world and secured our future that was won
by a hair's breadth.

A HAIR'S BREADTH

A Leap Beyond Chance

ARUN

Looking out, the rain poured down. It was a beautiful morning. The water snaked itself down the road and disappeared rushing into the murky green rim of the woods. He lowered his eyelids, silenced his thoughts, holding the image of the wet, gushing flow in his mind, a constant focus on the scene of the dirt road, sensing the rolling of the gravel in the water swirls, the small and the smaller pebbles, hearing in his mind's eye the sound of the rubble colliding, wildly tumbling in the rush of the streaming muddy water. The day as it had been for him became engulfed by and one with the stream. Spontaneously, he smiled. This was a very good day.

A soft sound made him turn, slightly. He tilted his head, still in the flow of the meditation, peering through the smallest crack of his left eye, letting his sight fall to rest on her as she eased into a more comfortable position on the sofa. She didn't acknowledge him watching her and, for an instant, he let his eyes take her in. Her features were more familiar to him than his own. As were her expressions. The feeling of love he felt towards her was always there, but sometimes, like now, an spontaneous burst of affection exploded as he indulged in her presence and he savored the warm emotions that spread throughout his being.

In his mind, he expressed an often-repeated mantra of gratitude and remembrance:

“How could humanity have survived it all? How is it that we are here when the times had been so terribly touch-and-go? Those times which had been so awfully and rightfully unforgiving toward us. Now we won't reverse. The responsibility is rooted in our hearts and minds. The trees are rooted and their fruit flowers blooming.”

The miracle of it crystallized in his mind. The developments that were no miracle in the “fell-into-our-lap” sense of the word, but still truly a miracle at the steps that had been taken by the many. To feel the abundance of his world made a smile glow deep within, sharing space with the sadness of his memories, forming his now. It made him humble and thankful to have become able to live with it all. These strong emotions, each on its' own having the power to sunder him – which he had almost let happen to him at earlier stages of his life. But now, integrated in his ability to feel, to

allow emotions to co-exist, he was slowly making himself whole. Every part blending and thus defining who he was. Even the pain of how he had been, so nearly torn beyond salvation, was now the essence of a glue that healed him at the seams. He could feel himself becoming more whole every day.

He let his eyes fall gently shut again, tilted his head comfortably and moved his mind back into the restful gushing of water, rubble ever moving, whirling, colliding with dampened thuds sounding in his innermost, serene core.

RAISIE

She didn't have to see him to know he was watching her. That kind of knowing was not eerie to her anymore. She had a well-developed sense of the world around her – the things she perceived were often accurate. All things and occurrences could not be rationally explained. "Yet", she thought. But with him, being as close as they had been for such a long time and being in this same room made the awareness of his actions not surprising at all. Having had his companionship for decades, it might be that she could subconsciously smell him when his movements caused tiny wafts of air to shift off his body. Maybe she would know even if he budged ever so slightly or silently and, like now, completely out of her view. Whatever the explanation, she felt him and knew undeniably that what she felt was the warmth of his gaze, of him having turned his head toward her.

She could also sense the depth of his mediation. Glancing now, she could see that his breathing was slow and serene, rich with contemplation. She would let him have another half hour before she told him about the phone call. He deserved that. And she would doze. She deserved a good doze.

Relaxing her head on the armrest behind her, she let go of the book, letting it rest upside down in her lap, folded her hands over her chest and began taking in the room with eyes half-shut. It was the

largest room in the house, in the south-west corner on the ground floor. This was the place she loved most in their home.

The dark, wooden walls were crammed shelves filled with old books in multitudes of forms, sizes and age. A gold mine in her understanding of treasure. In the nook where Arun was nestled in contemplation were three huge windows with the deepest sills facing the forest and its untended thick trees and bushes in one direction. The openness of the sky meeting the sea over the cliffs in the other. The roof-to-floor sized windows on the other walls gave unexpected light, simply cancelling out the murkiness of the dark furniture and fittings even on a rainy day like this one. She loved the absence of curtains, the light being allowed to reflect unhindered in the wooden browns of the floorboards.

The sofas and armchairs in soft, breathing fabrics of colors in tones reminding her of paintings by van Gogh. The cushions and armrests would always hold the memories of the wild, fun chaos which their family had brought about them from the day they'd chosen this furniture in the store to the closeness of playing, resting and sitting in them through the years. Now they were cherished for the family reunions together.

She loved the way the sofa snuggled around her and let her drift into restfulness. Fond and fonder memories were soaked into this room. She loved this place more than any other in the world. Here she would let difficulties come to rest. So many things, so many yet to come and such a blissful now.

Slowly, she began to doze off into woven threads of the scenes around her, soaring in images of what her life was filled with, painting them lovingly in her mind and warping it all into the contexts of dreams. Before shutting her eyes completely she took in the unruly top of Arun's ginger hair, the wrinkles around his eyes resembling halves of smiles.

Closing and spontaneously hugging the absolute gem of a book she'd found in the jungle of old-school literature filling up the shelves around her. It was the first of her grandmother's diaries.

There were six of them and the first entries had been made over 90 years ago. She couldn't believe

how fortunate she'd been to find them hidden in a remote corner on the second shelf down from the ceiling. She remembered the distinguished lady's chestnut-gray, wild bomb of hair, her loving, sharp eyes always twinkling and adoring her "little Raisin," as she used to call her. All the while hugging her very, very tightly and often. Raisie had always called her "Grand-Gran" when they met and then this charismatic little lady would say:

"I'm the Gray-Grand-Gran of Light" and they would laugh and, of course, hug. A lot.

Later Raisie had understood that this had been a play on Grand-Gran's name, Lucia. It had always seemed so wonderful to Raisie that someone could refer to themselves as a bearer of light. And Lucia had always had a presence which radiated inclusion; it quite literally glowed from her. She spread warm humanity around her, even when she was angry.

The words she'd just read in the hand-written legacy echoed softly inside her. In that boundless place between slumber and dreams she could even hear the tone of that voice from her distant past:

"Will we ever begin realizing that the responsibility is ours, each one of us, or will the focus and obsession with *others'* irresponsibility be what sinks us all? Will *I* ever be able to stop blaming?"

Then, in the echoes of that wise ancestor, unknowingly, Raisie slept.

LUCIA

} Yesterday, my heart broke. Again. My neighbor's son looked at me from a bottomless pit of absence of hope and lashed out:

'How could you just sit there, all your generation, and have the stomach to tell us that WE have to be the ones to put this right?! How dare you? My generation is crying in pure anguish, madly laughing about being the last generation. We don't have the life experience to solve this. We haven't developed the intelligence or resources to make those kinds of changes – we're just

children! The planet is going down and you lot are just sitting there. You've been sitting there for decades. All you do is blame everyone else! It's too late. It's too fucking late!'

He's 14! And what he said felt like a bombshell exploding straight in my face. It shattered my heart!

I don't know how to handle it. Well, in the moment, I hugged him and told him that I would not give up. That I would keep challenging the city council. I vowed that I would keep doing my part.

'I know, Lucia. This isn't all on you. I'm sorry. I just don't understand. I read about a scientist who claimed that we don't need to buy organic food because the nutrition isn't any higher than in "conventionally" grown stuff! How could he not know that that is not the reason why we buy organically grown stuff? How? Or is he paid to say such stupid things?!'

I couldn't come up with an answer. I just looked back at him, forcing myself not to look down in shame from those wide, questioning eyes! He went on:

'Buying organic is about us taking care of the Earth, of the soil of the Earth so that it will be cultivable and still enriched for the future! For our future, our existence. How does a person of science not see beyond that bullshit? Can we even call someone who thinks like that a scientist? No perspective of human benefit whatsoever!' Tears of despair and pure anger streamed down his face.

I shook my head, hugged him again and felt the well-merited shame sinking deeper into my heart. How could we have let this happen? How? I remember blaming my parents back in the day but in our time the threat of real, factual destruction was not on our doorstep, not like this. I've always blamed somebody else. I think that's what we've all been doing for thousands of years. It's probably what made us survive as a species in the first place but now that tactic for survival has really outdone its functionality.

The truth is that I suddenly saw, too clearly, my inability to look beyond my own family, my own group, my own interests and, especially, my own wallet. I only began to change my habits a few, maybe three or four, years back. The boy made me realize how I was enmeshed in my own "problems" and only felt relief when blaming others.

I am a part of the problem. And even though I buy organically now and try to keep myself to purchases from companies that are responsibly managing our resources (both labor- and commodity-wise), I've left the car parked most days, and have gotten solar-powered chargers, I'm still a part of this bloody problem simply because I am human.

Grrr-dammit! I'm ransacking my brain right now. What more can I truly do? What can a one-person army really accomplish beyond being responsible for my actions as a consumer? Or maybe that actually is a bigger step than I give it credit for.

The depth of the boy's desperation, the cry for help and need for adults to become responsible and to step up. The fact that his worry is as constant and as emotionally draining as he made me understand really shook me.

I'm beginning to come to terms with the fact that politicians WILL NOT be responsible for the change of the course of things. And I'm even more to terms with the fact that the perversely few who "own" our planets resources WILL NOT back down from increasing their profits by continuing to plunder their inherited "rights", a.k.a. they will not, and will continue not to give, a flying goats shit about anyone else! (I have my own family's arguments and miniature fortune to give me that answer most terribly clearly!)

Everyone blames the next person – the next plunderer, the next company, the next country, the next religion, the next ideology! 'This is how it's always been' and 'We will never change', we say. 'This is the way we are and that's not going to change.'

Enough! 'To each their own responsibility', I say!

I'm really fed up with myself for having had such narrow-mindedness. It's degrading for me as a creative, innovative and intelligent human being. Claiming to know what me and my fellow humans are and aren't capable of. To have the impudence to keep telling myself how I actually cannot take more responsibility because whatever I do won't matter!

If I can realize that the only one who can change the world is me then I've already changed my ability and can assume my responsibilities toward the world.

We have the technology to evolve now. The Dark Ages of the past 1000 years with slaves, torture, death penalties, human offerings, rabid persecutions, no clues what-so-ever about mental health or physical ailments are over. Think what suffering we are saved from by discovering what simply washing your hands and linen or not coughing in your hand does, and if you still get sick, think about the miracle of penicillin! My goodness, what suffering we are liberated from. Anyone who has had toothache or a fracture or even a headache knows! The Light Ages are here!

The bloody, violent conflicts, inhumane incarcerations and hammering holes in people's heads to let out the "evil spirits" are definitely days that are fading into our past! But not if we, The Human Race - our one race - doesn't start growing an upright backbone - and now! Into responsible adults, for Grrr's sake!

No one else will do that part for me. I have behaved like a child for most of my life. Someone else, some vague other, has been to blame or someone else should be doing the hard work for me. If I've been able to lay my hands on something, I've felt entitled to it. It could be a job that I wasn't qualified for (yes, I'm thinking about that management position at Daddy's firm which I only qualified for by inheritance, my G!) or the lands that my family "owns" for personal profit and enjoyment (both monety and elitist recreation).

There is not a map on Earth that would, in the true meaning of the word, identify me as a responsible adult when I just let these things happen. I'm talking about growing up for real here.

The foremost tool for being able to plan and create a prosperous world for humanity as a whole has already been invented – the internet. The resources are here. To think of all the people who should be educated world-wide and what they would be able to do if they were. Think of the lessening of working hours for everybody. From CEOs to gym instructors, from gardeners to teachers. The Dark Ages are over if we want them to be!

I've done some heavy thinking these last few days - What?! Who? Me? Really?! I've believed for too long that we're somehow entering *into(!)* the Dark Ages in the here and now, but then it suddenly hit me – I can choose! I can disembark right now. I can make an individual choice to

become a responsible adult. I can bloody f-ing well grow up already! I still go to work. I still need the car sometimes. I still have the occasional platter of meat (I can't live without fish!!! Yet.) But I can stop buying coffee produced by people who are paid slave wages or in alcohol or other drugs. What if most consumers did that, then who could force anyone to start buying it again? It is not that important to me that I can't make that change in my life.

The hundred or so families that we are allowing to ravage our Earth for profit and the percentage of those who'd rather fill their own pockets with a few extra coins and buy slave-wage produce than take responsibility for our race's benefit, they will not back down. But if I really want this world to evolve, I could make a mighty big difference. Especially if the "I"s who do take this stand were billions of people. Billions of people choosing to become responsible adults. Maybe cutting down on 15 cups of coffee per month for a few years. Oooh! Mighty Mice!

It's not as if someone would assassinate me for taking a stand about what I choose to buy in the grocery store, is it?

Silent, non-violent options are the only viable actions I can see. There are so many taking these kinds of stands out there already. It's like the movie *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde, which illuminates the beauty of paying a favor or kindness forward instead of paying it back.

These kinds of actions also reverse the outdated human way of thinking which has brought us here. To see things as being that "rich people" are to blame or some faceless intruder is at fault or that it's always someone or something else that threatens and ruins everything. That pattern of thought has brought us here, to where we are in terms of a lot of positive things – we survived the age of the survival of the fittest when we sprinted up trees and holed ourselves up in caves for the one main instinct of living to see another day but now, to move on, to actually evolve beyond the animal kingdom, it is time for me to take responsibility for my own actions. It isn't my neighboring village's fault that the earth in my field is lacking nutrients. It is not my spouse's fault that I don't take care of my own health and safety, and so forth.

I am a one-person caretaker army just like anybody else is!

Shift my focus toward my behavior.

Shift my focus toward my responsibility.

Not Blaming the Big Bad Wolf or the Idiot Next Door.

Refocus!

Well, feeling a bit less shameful now. This is my responsibility, no one else is going to change my beloved Earth for me.

Taking care of my beautiful planet.

Taking care of my rich and wondrous world! ~

RAISIE

“It is just so much worse when it comes to your children,” she thought.

Turning her head back from a quick look at Arun, where he sat completely devastated at the kitchen table, she continued with the making of sandwiches. She wasn’t thinking of the love you feel toward your children, because the love she had for their children could never be described as worse, it was just heart-wrenching in a way that didn’t apply to other relatives or friends. She was thinking more along the lines of the way you identified and felt acutely, the joy, strife and pain on a deeper level with your children. More especially and more heart-crushingly so.

Feeling Arun’s pain as he just sat there silently with grim tears edging their way haltingly down his tense face. In this light they looked like trudging drops of quicksilver. She even felt a strange kind of guilt. As if being his closest partner wasn’t being enough for him right now. Also feeling guilty because she was a part of why his pain was there in the first place. She had failed at being a parent and her mother was the central cause and effect of it all. Raisie knew that this was really simplifying things and that she was being massively unfair to herself, but her feelings didn’t care

about her logical conclusions. They just pulsated inside, pushing shame and blame through her body.

“When did the call come in?” His voice was barely audible. She found herself intensely re-feeling the anguish she had felt as she had listened to the caller from the PDD, the Public Disturbance Department.

“Noon-ish. I came in after it and found that you were settling into the meditation. I knew it could wait. I just tried to do what I thought would help us be in as good a shape as possible for later. Well, for this, now. I’m surprised I slept for so long. I guess I felt calmed by them having picked him up and knowing that he was safe. They said he was resting so I felt we could rest. It’s strange, but I was feeling better about it before and fell asleep quite thankful, really.”

Arun nodded – they had talked about that on previous occasions. He too had expressed a sense of relief at knowing where their son was. It wasn’t the first time they had gotten this type of call. Ray, their eldest child, was a harshly troubled soul. And now, again, he was in custody for disturbance. She could hear that Arun’s words came out of strained emotional suffering, but she was glad that he at least had words this day.

“He has to have gotten used to this by now. Last time I got a feeling that he almost felt safe there. What happened this time?” Arun put the question as he absentmindedly smeared and smeared at the wetness on his cheeks, gave up and rested his hands in his lap. He let his teary, blinking eyes wander and come to rest looking toward the garden. She too looked that way but without seeing, but she knew him. He sat there completely still, taking in the summer greens of the birches glimmering with raindrops in the returning sunlight, the glistening grass. She could see him, how he was soaking his mind in the reflections of the recent downpour, in the water lingering and dripping among the branches. He was feeling and healing in a meditative presence. She admired the way he faced and lived this life. She had learned so much from him.

“They said he’d broken into the mansion during the weekend, changed all the locks and thrown most of the office’s furniture into a huge pile out back and soaked it in some kind of flame

enhancer. Fifteen minutes before people were supposed to be arriving at work this morning, he'd lit it up. They reckoned he must have drenched it all in vast amounts of lighter fluid to get that big a fire going so quickly. Thankfully, it rained!" She glanced at him but not being able to tell his reaction.

"As usual there were tell-tale signs that he'd been staying in the house for several nights. They thought probably four because of the holiday on Friday. He'd brought an inflatable mattress and his toiletries, a computer and a roll-up screen. Apparently he'd been very active online. There might be some trails. They were hopeful. Mother had been there too on several occasions – she'd apparently left some notes and she was there too this morning. They guessed she'd come in through the woods – the CCs were disabled but she said so herself. Both of them were cooperative when the PDD and the fire brigade arrived. Strange, but they must have wanted to be apprehended this time." At this last piece of information he looked back at her, or rather somewhere very nearly at her.

"Do you think he will ever come to terms with living? Will he learn to appreciate what the world is and is striving to become better at? What we are all building here?" Arun asked the questions out loud but she knew that they would not need to be answered by her. His questions only needed to exit his system, to be shared in the open, in the space of love they felt for their child. For the love of him they let them soar unanswered to hold their hope for him and his unruly cravings and lust for the past. A time he hadn't even been born to have ever seen. He just thrived on destructiveness. Why? Their forever question would always be the "Why"

They ate the sandwiches in silence. Completely focused, Raisie let such an ordinary thing fill up all her senses - the taste of them, the feel of them, the lifting of them to her mouth. Utterly savoring the flavors of the home-grown lettuce and tomatoes. The cheese, so hot and tasty, made from the milk from neighboring farm's lively cow, stingingly spiced deliciously with hot and hotter chilli peppers. The crunching sounds of the nuts and seeds of the bread became as deeply resonating to her as one of those flowing, harmonious, soft drum solos that she loved to sink into.

Letting the satisfaction of the sensation of eating, such a day-to-day constant, be what held her in

the present was among one of her favorite earth-grounding meditations. Visiting Ray would come soon enough.

Speaking to Mother and what Raisie already knew to be the utter futility of such a conversation, was a routine she had been through since she was a small child. She had come to terms with the pain and sorrow that her mother's views and actions caused her. She couldn't let that agony involuntarily take over her mindset and cause her too much personal havoc anymore. Her adult life had to be just that, *her* adult life. Not the continuum of the anchorless life as the dependent caught in the midst of her mother's whims. A life that had held only unpredictability for the child she was back then and who had been but a leaf in a turmoil of destructive winds. The actions that her mother unleashed without any meaningful before- or afterthought still affected Raisie's life but she was determined that those effects would no longer be what ruled her whole existence.

The world around her came back into focus. This moment with her partner, the scent of nature having been newly refreshed by the rains and the sensation of nourishment seeping, warming her, strengthening her blood. These became reality. Checkpoints of what was happening of true importance in the right here and the right now.

Arun looked up, straight at her as if he felt her returning to herself, and he even managed to send a weak but sincere smile her way. She nodded lovingly back. All was well. Thanks to being in this situation she could in fact stretch that evaluation into all being very well indeed. Arun could break down completely over Ray's impulsive actions. They were both very scared of what harm their son might cause but for some reason it was far worse for Arun to handle. Several times in the beginning he had been unable to function in his daily life. Work, hygiene, food, sleep, everything had just fallen apart for him too many times. Maybe her way of dealing with this wasn't healthy either: she would go absolutely work-berzerk-aholic crazy - but she too had practised hard at staying in the moment and facing the pain. They were becoming more stable because of the long time they involuntarily had gotten to process that Ray was who he was and acted out the way he did. They were both still struggling with the shame and blame for having neglected their child and with

having difficulties at letting go of the energy-sucking battles they were fighting to try and understand the “Why?”

She saw that her partner had finally begun moving beyond those worst early stages of acceptance. She needed him to get through this for them to be able to support each other in coping with whatever awaited for Ray and also with living with whatever consequences his acts of terrorism might have caused others. She needed her partner by her side and now she could see that he would be.

LUCIA

} Despite all attempts to fool people it is becoming quite clear to just about everyone now. Our leaders, both politically and financially, do not care a flying bat's ear about bettering the world. The horrid crimes against human beings on scales nearing the tens and hundreds of thousands that aren't being intervened against because of the monetary gain for a few individuals and “their” governments. Even the media has reembraced its role as bringer of news to our doorsteps and reports on information and investigative research that is of actual importance to our existence. Now most journalists dig up information, statistics and reports of real and true value while sales and popularity have become priorities of the past.

Journalistic persecution unfortunately has not. Newspapers are being relentlessly shut down and the attempts to shut down the internet are escalating. Today everyone knows that these attacks aren't actions of some ill-dressed, sweaty, malnourished hacker sitting in a crummy basement somewhere. It is clear that the culprits behind these assaults against the freedom of speech are the very “capable” dictators of humanity and their lobby groups. Their indifference to the big picture and their inability to value anything other than their own agenda is evident and no longer regarded

as conspiratorial propaganda. Their agenda is unquenchable, which of course requires them to exercise continued restraint over everybody else, regardless of the consequences for the planet as a whole. The real propagandists are they themselves and that, my dear Watson, is finally being accepted for the reality of what it is.

For the last few weeks, the media focus has been to go into vast depths regarding who truly uses and cashes in on society's benefits. It has previously been fed to people how the poor and those in need of societies' welfare have been leeches, living off other people's striving but the media have now reported on the faces of the true benefactors of other people's labor - and the cloaks and daggers these "leeches" have created for themselves with the aid of "legal" systems have been explained. Tax evaders and the sums that are being withheld from the global good have been clearly and simply described in media all over the world. The tax laws that have made this kind of skimming possible have been brought under scrutiny.

The loudest wake-up call has been that the very groups and leaders who have systematically and relentlessly accused people in need of bleeding society dry, turn out to be the very and actual ones receiving and deceiving, plucking the welfare from the world's countries and their communities. The middle classes are finally waking up to the truth of these matters. Hard working people from all walks of life who have never been truly safe in their unrelenting efforts to support themselves. Always being at the mercy of circumstance. Whether it be that the company or department no longer needs them or the workplace is affected by some catastrophe or another. It could also simply come down to health issues, be they personal or of someone in your family. Then it wouldn't matter how much effort you had put into your profession or how good you were at it. The means to bring monetary stability to your life were often crushed due to circumstances completely out of your own control. The propaganda and lies spread throughout centuries are finally falling flat. The truth is scoring home runs by the dozen.

I admire the way journalists don't stoop as low as printing portraits and scandalously naming and shaming families and certain people who have been using the system in this way. It really isn't

those people's fault. We have all been brought up in a world where these kinds of practices have been celebrated and enviable. The achievements of grand enterprises and admiring those who managed to lay things, lands, people under them. This has been how we defined "hard work" and the "heroes" of societies.

We as a race have defined success and being an achiever by stomping downward, sideways and always, always, way, way up the ladder. This has been our evaluation of strength and prosperity. So it's no one's fault – the news articles are very clear in describing this. Talk about journalism at its finest.

I'm just so happy that we're finally redefining success, achievement, strength, innovation, entrepreneurship and heroes. Which would not have been possible without the internet. Without the algorithms that make the work of compiling facts into comparable, source-checked and validated factual information possible, without freedom to access the World Wide Web, we would still be in the dark. Each of us minding our own business as usual. But now, when it has become plain to see how most people's work effort only lead to actual gain for a vanishing few individuals on corporate and political levels, people have become really pissed off. No one likes having been fed such lies and having been push-overs for those scandalously few during their methodically shameless, gluttonous and ill-mannered rampage.

The silent treatment has begun – people are closing ranks, or rather, wallets. Following non-violent choices with the discipline of someone having had an ice-cold bucket of reality check poured down their shirt, but having fun doing it. My neighbor always kisses her car's bumper goodbye, wishing it a good day and to take care while she's at work. Then she hops on that beautiful red bicycle she bought with chopper handles and an alligator horn, love it, and she is not really suffering all that much.

Tips on how to take silent action have been spreading through the web for a long time now and with amazingly successful results. The majority of the grown-ups in the human race are finally coming into the adulthood of the species. We will do and are doing anything to care for our

children's, our grandchildren's and our own futures. People are leaving their cars most days and, for remote locations, apps are used to facilitate car-pooling.

People, including yours truly, have begun to understand that if we're not responsible today and get our thumb out of our collective, procrastinating arse, I won't be seeing any luxury *at all* in 10 years from now. Then we'll all be having to bicycle wherever we live or how much groceries we have to pedal home. Media and individuals are sharing facts like crazy people. Numbers and graphs, slogans and talks focusing on, "for heaven's sake, do something now" or "when the doo-doo's hit the collective fan we'll be sent back into the bleeding Stone Age, people"!

The facts show that if we downsize now and restructure our "order" of things, we will finally live in paradise on Earth. Leaving the Dark Ages behind us. Voices are being raised for letting educated persons plan for the needs of society and to let ideologists (politicians and the like) and their employers (lobbyists and propagandists) have to stand from the bleachers rooting to try to get their agenda to be considered. Then we would stand a chance of making this planet great for once. And really, really important - we wouldn't have to be Mad Max paupers with great big seeping sores all over our existence – yeah, I stole that one off the internet and am proud to have done so.

A thriving Earth with its oceans of possibilities is becoming a realistic goal to pursue. The intelligence of humankind is at long last evolving past passive short-sightedness and into reaching for its fuller potential. From the hardest-working farmer to the empathetic CEO – we are more than many who are all pulling our straws into one enormous wondrous pile of factual change. There aren't enough armed forces or hired private policing in the world to stop this kind of action. Hope combined with the will and discipline of our race, the supercalifragilisticexpialidocious species of Homo the Sapiens, with fierce personal determination to live on, together, cancels out the fear of being persecuted. Each and every one taking action, and "doing one's bit" finally means what it is supposed to mean. ~

RAISIE

She went out into the garden and sat back in the hammock trying to get some work done before they had to leave for the city. She gave up almost immediately. Her mind wandered. She realized that she needed it to. When she worried about Ray and her mother, especially right after they had been caught committing criminal offenses, she found that the best remedy was meditating on what those two hoped to achieve while assessing the current state of the real world.

She preferred calling her practice of meditation a “reflection” or “contemplation about things”. She let her mind flow through scenes of how manageable the world was becoming and comparing those facts with what she was told to be the motivations for the rebels and their attacks. She knew that this way of reviewing what was going on would get her into a more balanced state of mind. She let go and the thoughts came and went, alternately focusing on the progress of the human race and those who agitated for a regression back to the old ways. The progress of personal freedoms versus the ball and chain the activists were struggling to reinstate. She closed her eyes.

The calculations were that about two hundred thousand people in the world still kept fighting to revert back to the old ways. Instead of working alongside the majority of humanity toward global beneficial solutions, the rebel tactics were to lash out against anything that didn't fit their own agenda, blaming others for what was wrong with the world. Keeping each other fired up with slogans and denying any facts or statistics that contradicted or didn't support their claims.

To lash out was almost instinctive human behaviour and Raisie herself was aware of falling into doing that herself if she didn't double check her motives. This had been the confused and illogical pattern of humanity these past few thousand years. Acting harshly on the defense, attacking without seeing the bigger picture and instinctively blaming. This was often her first reaction to all new things; she was unquestionably human. She was especially suspicious when it came to uncharted territory and difficult situations, at least before she had calmed down and reviewed the facts. Like

an animal hoping to claim a new territory, indiscriminately tearing everything to shreds around it.

This last and ongoing human evolution, this huge leap for mankind, had had to be deliberately staged out of simply doing or dying. Suddenly there hadn't been enough time to await the natural evolution of humanity's intelligence. She felt a surge of pride at the progress being made and her mind was fed with positive impulses, relieving the strain of her personal sorrows which were slowly beginning to come untangled inside her. She kept on, letting go and going with the flow in her mind.

Mankind would have ruined too much of its' living conditions had we waited for the natural development of preferring to choose beneficial actions in our daily existence, she thought. There would have been no resources left to lead us forward had we waited that long. That is if we had even survived that long. The timescale humanity had been facing was suddenly an alarming one or two decades before horrific damage had brought disaster to the common man's doorstep. This was just before the second quarter of the last century!

Most people had been on the verge of being locked out from the freedom of speech through powerful lobbyists nearly having succeeded at limiting free and public access to the internet. Those laws had been just a couple of tenths of months away from becoming a reality. The threat to the obsolete ways of mismanagement had become too close for comfort for some.

Raisie remembered how Lucia had described the massive information campaigns that pumped through the web, huge numbers of people informing and working hard to keep and expand the internet for all people to use. It had been a terrifying race against the elimination of personal freedom. It could have ended with the reversing of humanity back to its previous history of geographical isolation. This attempt at shutting humanity off from each other was enacted by a few very powerful persons who wanted to limit the middle and lower classes' freedoms in monetary, creative and job-related matters.

Luckily for us, Raisie thought, those "owners" of the planet had misjudged humanity's potential and how we got out of our procrastination. Another wonderful fact was that they had understood the

positive impact of the World Wide Web too late. They weren't able to hinder the individual understanding that dawned on people. Globally, humanity rose up to the threat of being denied this digital tool and these fierce attempts to sever personal freedom came to shame. Another factor for the successful survival of the internet being open to all, just as we know it, was of course that, one by one, people from every walk of life were waking up and taking loud personal responsibility to safeguard their freedom of speech.

Other information that was widely spread over the web was about the importance of each and every one's responsibility for completely revising, reshaping and downsizing personal consumer dis-habits. This became an enormous cornerstone, if not *the* cornerstone, for our ongoing ability to have any dreams of being able to live luxuriously in the near future. Humanity was finally growing up, evolving into a responsible adult species, Raisie mused. Together with the individual self-discipline to actively park the oil-powered cars much more often, recycle one's own used packaging and left overs, wearing the same clothes or swapping them, a magnificent leap forward had taken root. The fear that was diminishing all hopes of any luxury in life in the near future and the seriousness of the situation, the need to better our world, had sunk in. For most people, anyway.

The changes that had been necessary for humanity to implement had to be enacted in a microscopic period of time. Not even a decade! But that was all the time that had been needed, Raisie thought. When competent people had been proven trustworthy and discreetly approached about working in these secretive planning committees, those individuals had eagerly joined. She always shuddered when thinking of the tales of those early days. She'd had them told to her by her Gray-Grand-Gran so many times.

Reading about them in Lucia's diaries had recently brought the bone-chilling reality of that imminent danger even closer to heart. To have had a person this close to her, in her own immediate family, who had been so actively involved in those early days was a gift. A person who had actually risked her life back then. Several of Lucia's co-workers around the globe had been assassinated. The courage of all those people, initially working undercover to create outlines for beneficial

management in all areas. Social planning, agriculture, health care, education, industry, logistics and so many more that were needed for humanity's innovative development. The pure bravery burning inside those people in the work groups was often what gave her the courage and stamina to continue with her work efforts in the present.

With that image of historical heroes filling her black empty hole of agony for her son, she surfaced from her deep contemplation with a sense of regained composure. The most prominent emotions she could identify now were gratitude and pride. The sorrow and shattered hopes for her child were there, as they always would be if he continued on this rampage as he fought against, well, everything, really. It was her burden, beyond painful, to bear. That was why these comparing and reflecting sessions were her buoys, helping her spirit fold upright again and her love for life burn brightly, leading, carrying her on.

LUCIA

} I remember the start of Earth Hour in 2007. I became so filled with hope for a brighter and better future but somehow the global awareness I had envisioned didn't make the giant leap for human kind that I had imagined. I saw the individualistic procrastination and the movement fading as it lost its momentum. But that was before the harsh truth of the beginning of the end of evolution for humanity became plain. The belief in the lie of every individual having extremely limited powers to "change the world" was *The Lie* which almost brought us to our knees.

Now people are realizing that it is only and absolutely every single one of us, and only us, that has the power to bring about change to the world. "No one else cares enough about you to do it for you and yours", so to speak. Now "Earth Hour" occurs in most homes, every day and Veggie Day of the week has transformed into Veggie Day most days of the year. We are seeing this through – the day

is here for all to see. The planet is healing and we are growing up into responsible adult Homo sapiens!

Today I'm buying more solar-battery-driven lamps and then I'm shutting down household power for even more hours per day. Globally, many who can't afford solar chargers are going out of their homes for two or three hours during the dark when they would usually be at home. World energy usage has plummeted. Governments and executives in the private sector have tried threatening people with tactical and even armed forces. Different kinds of police are monitoring how people are behaving as consumers these days. They don't know how to stop us and are getting quite agitated.

The slogan launched a few years ago:

“Manufacturers of plastic still think it's fantastic – only you can minimize production”.

This campaign brought an avalanche of action world-wide. People reusing what plastic they had until it was recycled and plastic-manufacturing companies began toppling everywhere and so we, the people, could see that each and every one's choice had brought about this enormous change. Humanity had united as a force majeure. A force to be reckoned with. And without violence, without risk for anyone's wellbeing. Who could pinpoint any one person as threatening the established disorder of the world? The silent action of the many. I can always close my eyes and feel the effect of the outcome of the plastic industry. The bafflement I felt, and the same went for everyone around me. The inspiration took hold as a wildfire hope spread in the world – person to person and through the internet. It was absolutely huge. The joy I felt was like a song singing in my whole being. The twinkles of light I suddenly shared with random people I met in the street! Amazing. There was a way!

The “never-mind”, “it doesn't matter what I do” attitudes and the naïve propaganda of “Why me? No one else is doing anything!” suddenly started to change into “What? Who me?! Can I really make this big a difference?!”. More and more stands are being taken on the level of the individual's own choices about consumer habits.

The meat thing is one thing no one talks about person to person anymore, but apparently the

industry is on its knees. Eating habits are so personal and shame and blame gets us nowhere so it's turned into a silent movement – well, except for on the internet. I know myself. I love meat and now I eat mostly fish, for now. But I would never be able to talk about my love for fish with some people and I have to keep my down-sizing at a manageable level to cope – I just can't bring myself to say "never again"! So I do veggies or the rare fishday, but always "just for today – tomorrow I'll make a new decision". I've managed to learn a lot of absolutely delicious Quorn dishes and have improved immensely at varying what I eat and building nutritious vegetarian dishes. I'm really taking care to know that I eat wholesome meals.

The cars are left in the garage, my clothes are being refitted, my furniture is restored instead of thrown out and so on. The avalanche we're seeing today is only the tiniest beginning of each and every one person's ability to be a part of saving and bettering our world. I didn't expect to feel so good about the things I'm choosing to put on hold for the next few years. It's an adventure in the middle of life, really. Indiana Jones-like but in "Raiders of the Found Earth"!

I do look forward to the day when I can buy a new, sweetly glam autumn jacket, but that day is not today! Responsibility is mine!

To get back to how I started this lengthy entry. All this change has come about with the tremendous support of, and grand stand taken by, the different news outlets. I get teary-eyed thinking about how the media has rolled up its sleeves and really gotten itself cleaned up. How most newspaper ads and posters no longer spew gory, emotionally intoxicating dramas onto passers-by on the pavement, feeding on our addiction to drama and targeting readers with scandals to keep sales up and keep us busy doing nothing. Instead, journalists and editors are reporting on matters of actual importance. The truth of the state of our world has become far too scary for anyone with a sane mind to ignore any longer.

We are changing the world and the elite of the elite are suddenly more scared than the rest of us. Now they are the ones being treated and regarded as individuals representing real-life non-importance while everyday Jos, Joes and Josies are recognized as standing up and acting for

everything that is of significant worth. Developing the world for real and standing true. ~

ARUN

The landscape flowed past them. Parks surrounding high-rises in what used to be suburbs with indefensible segregation. Once the streets had been ruled by strife, sorrows and crime. There had been sparks of intelligence burning there to make a difference for all those people, but they had always been dependant on the good-will of insufficiently capable councils and the off-chance charitable handout from the elite. Now such areas held mostly stores, offices, administrative departments for communities, recreational activities and lots of homes – but for people who chose to live here.

Young people, mostly families, and many elderly preferred to have their homes in these geographical locations. The silence in these areas, the surrounding woods and lakes combined with the closeness to places to engage in sports and exercise were very attractive for busy parents of small children. Also their kids' friends were close by which made for a calmer family life. Major routes for commuting circulated the outskirts of the cities and that also drew many people to want to live here. It was vastly more sought after than the administrations of cities had believed in the early days when reviewing populations as to their preferred and suitable living conditions. Also the possibility of growing your own veggies and being active in your own recycling processes were attractive factors which made many families enjoy living like this.

Raisie and he talked about how they would be moving here eventually. When cleaning the house and taking care of their part of the garden was becoming more of a burden than the regenerating chores they found them to be today. Also to live only the two of them. Not saying he didn't love having others around them at the house but to enjoy the pro's of being less reachable, which in his

book was an elderly person's birthright, was something they both looked forward to. As if he'd just realized that the years were flying by, he tilted his head. They were probably closing in on the time when they would need to start looking into what kind of place they would prefer. He'd heard the waiting lists were down to a couple of years. Anticipation filled him. In the midst of all the hardship, there was still a life to be lived.

The vehicle was on route to Raisie's work where Angela and Ray were being held for the umpteenth time. Arun served his partner a glass of water. She lifted her eyes from the work screen, smiling as she accepted the drink, and he saw that she was emotionally exhausted. Or maybe he saw himself through her eyes. Probably both.

He leaned back into his seat, adjusted its angle and tried to relax, gazing up at the sky. The drained rain clouds were lighter and scattering, the heavier ones moving off far away on the horizon, pouring their heavy loads upon other parts of the land. The air was scented by the freshly washed greens of the countryside bordering the freeway. The AC filled the car with the smell of grass and wet summer; he inhaled deeply through his nostrils, let out a soft sigh, prepared and flexed his emotional muscles and then made the call.

"Ring Work Simon F," he spoke. Simon's voice instantly filled the air. As if he'd just been standing there waiting. Arun smiled at the thought.

"Hey, Arun! It was really tough having to give you this message. Again. This time we think there's enough cause to get working on a better, long-term solution for them both. Is Raisie with you?"

Raisie answered:

"Yeah, I was on my way into work today anyway. Has he said anything new?"

"Naah, it's the same old, same old. Except that he's much angrier than we've seen him before. The damage to property has never been this bad and the drug test showed several heavy positives. I really feel very sad for him. And for you guys, of course. We're struggling here. It's a fine line between constructively approaching his issues and knowing that there is no question about the need

for strict boundaries from here on in. We're waking up to realizing how tight the boundaries need to be. It's too late to be beating ourselves up for ignoring their escalation, so instead we are trying to view this as a tremendous step forward for us. I guess. Hopefully it will be a way forward for him too. We're discussing strategies for getting through to him, but for now it seems too soon to do anything else but wait."

"How long will he be at the PDD for?"

"The timeline is at least three weeks before we can determine even the broadest outlines of a plan. In the meantime he'll be in withdrawal and in a few days he might be willing to go to a recovery group. It will have to wait another few days until he gets off the medication that is carrying his body through detox right now. Except for seeing you guys, he'll only be seeing the counselling team here. It'll be at least a week before we can even begin to consider working out a rehabilitation program. We've tried so many approaches before. It's easier with Angela because she is more straightforward with expressing her inner thoughts – we have quite a clear picture of her issues, so to speak. With Ray it's as if he hasn't matured into expressing or possibly being able to identify, even to himself, what is going on inside him. Yeah." Simon stopped speaking. He always rambled when he was emotionally invested in a case. More so with their family because he had strong ties with them. Arun appreciated him deeply. Simon always did his job with the big picture in mind. He was glad that he had transferred to their area and that they had become so close.

"And my mother?" Raisie sounded resigned.

"Angela's not speaking to us. She's asked for online access but of course it's been denied. Her boasting will absolutely not be reaching the general public." He was clearly agitated. "After this stunt it will be a long while coming. If ever. And it's the same for him. We can't have them going on this wildly destructively anymore. Their followers are few but they are real and they are dangerous. There are those that listen to them and do what they are told. Their rage is hard-core. We can't let it continue. We're restricting them both heavily. The only questions are the where, how and most humane outlines of keeping them in long-term rehabilitatory custody. I'm so sorry they

have got so far out of hand. I keep second-guessing myself, as does the whole workplace right now. Alright. Gotta go. We'll talk more after you've seen him."

"It is nobody's fault, Simon." Arun sounded weary but utterly sincere. His voice broke slightly and Raisie took both his hands in hers. As much for her own sake, he guessed. "We're arriving in 20. See you soon. Over and out."

The connection ended with that pre-programmed command. The fun they'd had when making that choice of words in the past was lost on him now, and saying them reached inside, surfacing emotions within subconscious memories of normalcy. Ray and he bickering about what words to choose for their car phone when Ray had been a starry-eyed little boy of four.

Raisie lifted one hand to stroke his cheek. He leant in and rested his forehead on her shoulder.

"The guilt of those 6 months when we left him with her." His voice ached.

"Yes," she answered, barely audible. "Yes, this truly sucks!"

He felt her stroking his hair, his shoulders and he let the tears flow. He would never get over this. His mind screamed "Never!" Not as long as their child was hurting himself and others like this. Even when he would be locked up, his mind would keep chasing him with destructive anger.

The whole family was suffering. Well, except for Raisie's mother, he thought, acidly. But, no, that wasn't true, he knew that she suffered too. In her own, lost way. She suffered from the cravings, her maddening, psychopathic illusions of not ever having enough. Of not being noticed enough. Probably she suffered mostly subconsciously from the starvation of never being able to share anything with mentally wholesome people.

Despite all the terrible things Angela did, he was always saddened by the realisation of her never being able to connect deeply with family and friends in the way a healthily striving and thankful person could. Reflecting on that terrible isolation, of that being her, and Ray's true loss, actually helped him live with this situation. It gave him empathy and some reprieve from the agony of being shut out from, especially, his son's life. But he was still angry or, rather, beyond-words furious, and rightfully so. The futility of their terror causing so much terror in the world. For eons, greed had

been causing enough suffering. Why was he the one to have a child involved in such remnants of the ugly past?

He moaned and drew slowly away from his partner's touch. Her loving gaze through tear-filled eyes made him smile, kindling a trickle of light, of hope and love, seeping through the pain.

"I know, Raisie. I know. But how could we have guessed? And why the other children never fell for her propaganda is a harsh thing to have to live with. I know! But the heart bleeds and the dreams linger for another future for our beautiful Ray." They had said it a thousand times before and, agonizingly so, they had resigned themselves to having to say it yet another thousand times.

He closed his eyes and, after a moment, he felt the meditative calm reclaiming space inside him. The truth of everything was that right now all was as well as it possibly could be.

The bliss of living among people who were pulling together, creating an astounding world, a population of endless powers and splendor. Their planet, where there was always more than enough. Always luxuries to enjoy and more inspiring innovations than anyone had ever dreamed of humanity being able to achieve. And to share. The truth was that without sharing of responsibilities, the achievements of the last century would never have come about. The understanding of the abundance of Earth, which humanity within a hair's breadth had managed to wake up to beholding. The wonder of a world such as this – thankfully we had grown ourselves up in time to partake of it.

The sorrow and anger were slowly woven back together within the acceptance, gratitude and resignation toward this situation. Somehow, within the weave of that intricate tapestry, he could see patterns of hope interwoven with the despair of it all. He even saw the beauty of the human race's disposition toward destruction, its heritage of depleting and devouring. The old ways which had ruled humanity even before it was born, before crawling out of the sea. In this intelligent era it seemed clearly insane but for our survival this drive to ravage had been a terrifying necessity. The force of having a birthright to quench all others and all else. He saw that without that drive, within those initial crushing conquests, and if life hadn't been ruled by that impulse, they wouldn't have survived as a species at all and perished already in those early beginnings. The opera of bringing

death, celebrating conquest, held the beauty of furthering life until it was actually, now, flowering into its proper grandeur. A time when Homo sapiens could finally begin to prosper.

“Thank goodness we woke up to extending our evolution before it was too late,” he thought.

ANGELA

She chewed the food, making a disgusted face to deliberately provoke if anyone was watching. Which they probably were. “Communist swill,” her father’s voice echoed in her mind. He’d said that about anything which he perceived repulsive. She smiled at the image of his thundering personality, remembering the laughs and nods of agreement he would receive in the company they’d kept in those days.

The food wasn’t all bad but memories of the large side table in the dining room of her childhood’s main home haunted her. It had always been over-filled at meal times and brimming even between meals too. The servants piled it up stylishly with a splendid variety of fresh fruit, cold cuts, several kinds of bread and crisps, soup, yoghurts, cereal and beverages of all tastes and colors. Her memories made her pull a more heartfelt suffering face, mirroring the painful, constant throbbing that plagued her underneath the masks she put on with the contemptuous grimaces. With the years it had become harder to disguise her hatred for this new world.

She had to fight the impulse not to just spit out what she was chewing. Instead she did what she had been taught to do since she was a small child and stuffed and squeezed the lid shut which held her screams of dissatisfaction in check. Her body vibrated with the anger of what her existence had turned into. She didn’t want this breakfast! She only ever wanted her life back!

Fifty years had passed since she had been about to marry Joel, the match of their families’ dreams. They had planned the whole honeymoon, going Earth-hopping between their to-be-gifted holiday

homes – symbol tokens of the prosperity that their vows would bring. They would receive one home from each family. The island home from her side which she had handpicked herself, and which of course was her favorite. His had been a mansion in an exclusive ski-resort in an area which was cherished for its beautiful slopes. It was an ideal spot for spending time even during the few months when there wasn't any snow. Treks and in-door facilities which offered every kind of activity all year round.

The pain and anger choked at her senses. All these years later, she couldn't think about those places and what had become of them. It was a horrifying, living nightmare. All the things she had planned, all the things that had been robbed from her. And then, as if this plundering wasn't enough there came the disgusting betrayal by so many of her own kind. Even by Joel. Breaking his vows in that shameful manner. She would never accept what he did to her! Not ever! Saying that he understood the need for cutting down on their lifestyle. They didn't bloody need to! They hadn't ever had to in a million years!

She leaned back in the couch, closing her eyes. She tried to breathe slower to calm herself down so that she could live to fight another day. Trips down memory lane were necessary for her though. It had kept her spirit motivated and strengthened throughout these hellish decades. But the pain and anguish it caused her to review Joel's betrayal was a near-maddening place to revisit. His complete co-operation when leaving their honeymoon homes to public interest! She spat a furious noise despite herself. How she could have misjudged someone so completely. The cowardice! The lameness of them all.

“But Angela! If you would only just look at the research. Science proves that more equal pre-conditions make for blooming societies. Why are you being so hard-headed? If you give a small child from the jungles of South America a laptop they will learn it as quickly as a small child from your family. If you teach delegatory skills to people who have the talent for such things there will no longer be the so-called need for workaholic one-man shows such as our parents and their executives to be in control, completely trampling other people in the process. No one would have to

work control-freakish 18 hours a day or 8 days a week – not in any occupation! Just read this book!” He’d tossed some Hans Rosling or Steven Pinker or some other “communist” to her. He’d become obsessed with such drivel. She’d almost thrown something back at him. Instead she’d thrown him out, screaming him out the front door.

“Don’t ever come back! How dare you?! Here I am, being thrown out into the streets despite everything I have done for people. And to think of all the charities I’ve hosted! How dare you come telling me what to read, insinuating that I am a bad person? I’ve always been charitable! Always!” He’d had the audacity to look back and smirk at her. Smirk! He laughed:

“Yes, handouts to the less fortunate. How original and long-sighted of you. Ask yourself what good charity ever did anyone in the long run, Angela. Just take a moment and f-ing ask yourself!”

Now she threw a giant vase with a multi-colored bouquet aimed straight at his smirking, twinkling eyes. That last look at him had etched itself into her memory. An f-ing nightmare!

It wasn’t her finest hour and unfortunately, it was often from that scenario, in the warped way of dreams, that she awoke, completely worked up, in the mornings as if having screamed at him for what felt like days. Decades of that infuriating nightmare, lingering during her waking hours, scratching at the depths of her being. The things she wanted to say to him and the likes of him, the billions of them out there. The words were an endless, countless flow of points that never seemed to ebb and that never reached their targets. But now, soon, they just might just have to listen.

Many in her family, and Joel’s, had protested and proclaimed their futile refusals to leave their estates and companies, but they had all given in in the end. Their birthrights were taken. It had killed her father. But it surely had invigorated her treacherous mother.

They could all have persisted and fought harder, fiercer and longer. Angela firmly believed that they could have made it through the crisis if they had only brought much harder, sheer force to the struggle. They could have paid their security staff, police and military assets vastly higher sums and given them estates. With essential material benefits she firmly believed that many armed forces, as well as executives and other staff, would have refused to give in as easily to what the insurgents

labelled “the greater good”.

In spite of herself, she made a face again. “The greater good”. Not her greater good at all and in the future humanity would die in its own incapable muck. It was as appalling to her now as it had been then. To think that any trivial nobody could just walk right in and be allowed to simply take her property away from her.

She wouldn’t give up. Not ever. She had powerful allies. Through the years they had been drawn to each other through old and new acquaintances and coded posts on the internet. They had become strengthened and inspired by the successful execution of many acts of defiance. They would keep on fighting and be ready to rebuild the world back to the natural order of things. The way the world needed to be, the way that it had always been.

They would probably never get exactly everything back in her lifetime but they would start to build new families, new empires. New fortunes. Showing the world that “the greater good” was for the masses to be safely led by strong people. Those who knew how to steer the world toward true greatness. Just like when she was a little girl.

It wouldn’t be long before the population of the Earth would lose this momentum and all would fall into barbaric chaos. Then she and hers would be there with full force, organised to take over and fortify their meant roles. Shepherding the flock again. Letting the benevolence of their charity be known.

She chewed and the urge to spit almost overwhelmed her again, her mouth was struggling to keep chewing, attempting to keep her mask of composed contempt. Probably not managing all too well though. She swallowed and resolutely took a new bite.

She was afraid that these encapsulated feelings might cause her to explode or, more probably, implode without being able to contact her allies. She couldn’t go online, she couldn’t phone anyone. The commies had seen to that this time. She smiled painfully again. “Commies”. How she missed her father! At the thought of what they had done to him, breaking his heart and taking away his purpose in life, she could almost hear the flames of fury that raged inside her, firing iron-melting

molds of hatred. But then she thought of what was to come and it was as if water started gushing within her, emotions fizzing, letting off steam and the fire gently lapping within darkly glowing embers, gleaming with the promise of a just future.

She knew that Ray and she had crossed the PDD's line brutally this time. The fire they had caused was a tactic that had been agreed upon as one of several distractions to minimize the risk of them discovering the organizing of the upcoming main attacks. She would have to stew in here and try to enjoy what she could. Visits, interrogations and fresh air.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door and, when she didn't answer, another knock and then someone spoke in a sugar-coated tone into the flat's intercom from the hallway.

"Angela. Your daughter's here to see you. Do you want to come to the visiting room or shall I send her in?"

She straightened her back. She never refused these meetings with her child, though she could have if she had wanted to. To have raised Raisie and always shared her core values and beliefs with her and still she had ended up like this, on the complete opposite side. It was something she would just never accept as anything more than a prolonged teenage rebellion. The illogic of this "new world" would become evident to her bright child in time, and Angela would always stand there with open arms for her Raisie when she came to her senses.

She was overwhelmingly thankful for Ray. She might not have coped without him understanding. To be standing utterly alone in the midst of this raving madness would have been far too painful for words.

She finished her raspberry yoghurt and nodded her response towards the door unit's camera. She knew the guard was standing patiently in the hallway, waiting for her reply. Without looking straight at "the help", or in this instance the lens, just as she was raised, she offhandedly commanded:

"Send her in. I'm done now," pushing the tray in front of her with a resigned inner shrug, giving the ugly crockery a final distasteful glance. She'd seen worse during her time in exile.

She rose and stood by the window and in a few moments Raisie's voice sounded softly:

"Hi, Mommy. How are you this morning?"

THE KEY

Walking off the floating dock onto the concrete walkway, she felt her body sway with the wobbly gait of a sailor unused to solid land underfoot. The adrenaline pounding through her veins made that awkwardness very much a secondary discomfort. It did make her even more nauseous and rigid though. Without looking back she, walked determinedly through the gates of the marina. A care-free but self-aware First Mate's smile spread across her face as she gave a small wave to the guards just inside the huge windows of the dock's office. Being a well-trained covert operative she always had the correct appearance in store for the world around her. When she had gone through the paperwork with the customs officials earlier, her plastered-on professional face along with supremely practised manners, including the tiny spice of what she thought of as First Mate contempt, reserved only for law enforcers and landlubbers, had been perfectly administered so as to deflect attention and not raise any eyebrows.

She slowly got her bearings on steady ground and made her way up into the town. Her thoughts went to the boss, where he lay bobbing in their U-sub somewhere out to sea. The risk of hiding him in the hull had never been an option. He was too valuable and sought after to take that risk. They had a genius First Engineer who had created a device for locating targets in the ocean without the beacon emerging from the U-sub being identified as a threat. An invention yet to be uncovered by the Global Oceanic PDD. She wished that the ignition key she was picking up today would have been possible for their engineer to create. She always trusted their own team above all others with all the traitors dropping out of late. But the level of technology had apparently been beyond even

their First Engineer's skills.

The breeze was very light. This had been the criteria for the mission to be carried out at all. She was going to have to travel to the meeting place by hover-bike. She approached the bicycle hire outlet, transferred the bonus points required for a whole day's usage, and was digitally assigned a vehicle in the lot behind the outlet. Sitting on the saddle, she entered the code and gave the command: "Elevate 20 to 25 meters." The bike rose evenly, making gentle course adjustments veering from other path users. "Manual pedaling." An automated query sounded from the machine: "Do you have shield requests or please say 'automatic'."

"Insects and wind," even though it was calm, you never knew this close to the sea and insects weren't her favorite snack. She wanted to have a relaxing ride for her own sake but it was also most essential to keep up the appearance of a touristic outing.

When the desired height was reached and the bike leveled to a standstill, she began pedaling. She preferred to exercise on these things as long as she wasn't in a hurry. Keeping her eyes alternately on the sights, traffic and the dashboard, out of pure habit, she set off.

The town was picturesque. Laid out along the shoreline, like the crust of a slice of bread bending in uneven breadths along a broad, sandy beach. The smallish, wooden houses sprinkled the sides of narrow, winding cobblestone walkways, roofs and windows in all colors of the rainbow. Bursts of greens in the multitude of bulbous tree crowns connecting like dots along the emerald worms of lush bushes. Meadows and backyards bringing nature naturally flowing between the habitat areas. Even though her heart always ached for the sea, she suspected that this kind of township might be able to keep her anchored longer than most. She gazed inland, beyond the town's borders toward the endless flow of hills and fields forging with the sky on the horizon. 'It just might,' she thought.

The town was known for its artistic community and its main exports were decorative creations. She could understand the inspiration of these surroundings and the attraction of the quiet of the countryside, which stretched undeveloped for tens of kilometers around it. Being a very talented painter herself, she could feel her inspiration thriving on so many levels if she were to root herself

here for a while. A small smile twitched on her face. Maybe when this mission was complete whether the boss survived it or not, she was free to do as she pleased. They had negotiated the terms of her continued service last week. To her surprise, he had been the one to bring it up. She supposed he had because he knew that she would never ever suggest leaving her job. Lately, he seemed to be dismantling his whole operation.

She owed this life, her freedom, to him. Even though that freedom had been tied to living most of her life on the yacht. It was only 15 years ago that he had made it possible for her to live without fear of being apprehended due to facial recognition scanning. He had used an agent within the PDD to erase her profile within the correctional system. He had also found out that she hadn't actually killed her partner on that fateful day, now so far in the past. She was still wanted for aggravated assault and possible attempted to murder, but at least not for an actual murder.

When he didn't need her services anymore she could freely walk the Earth, so to speak. Even though living on land wasn't a life she could see herself conforming to for longer periods of time, having the possibility to had made her feel less tied down.

Now it seemed that their, for her, almost life-long agreement was nearing its end. She was both excited and saddened. The rush of the danger in being an active Reactionist, the edgy sense of purpose and being in a constant mode of 'getting-back-at-the-bastards', that she would miss. Many of the crew speculated that she was romantically, or even sexually involved with the boss, but her devotion had never been molded from any of those things. She was beyond words faithful to the pledge made more than three decades ago. An oath she had made to herself more than to him. She had always been like that – very black and white in her commitments. Never one to re-evaluate promises. Especially not this one.

Jabs of emotional jolts seared inside her. They always came with the flashing images of the events of that afternoon 36 years ago. Despite her fighting to bury them ever since then, they surfaced. Over and over again. Especially in dreams and often, as now, when she tasted serenity and felt drawn to normalcy.

Images of the knife, the silent sliding in and out of flesh, the empty fear and disbelief in the face of her tormentor. The gaping, wordless mouth. The person she had fled her family to be with, for what she had mistaken to be love, had instead befriended her parents. Her partner who without hesitation harmed her in the same way that she had been brought up to suffer as routine.

Re-living that life-churning moment when they had sat at the dinner table, invited by her parents, and the fist had landed, without warning, against her jaw. The steak knife had just been there. Hate and humiliation had been the forces charging her hands as she grabbed for it. The silence of the jabs sounded unending, on repeat through the decades, in her soul.

She smelled the blood, even now. The echoes of the female voice, her mother's, in screams forcing her to flee through the door of her childhood home. Again. This time leaving a body, her abuser's body, which she had believed to be dead, behind.

Running in panic, concealing the blood on her pants and shirt under her cloak she made her way to the only place she had ever felt safe. The only location she knew to be secret. The Reactionist meeting place. He was there and he let her in. His hand reached for her cheek where he had noticed a bloodstain. She remembered how she registered him taking note of her flinching and she re-felt the deep shame, the forever shame she had always felt for being wrong. So wrong that her parents could hit her and no one would even stand up for her. Proving to her that, yes, she was wrong. Later in life she had realized that no one had been interested enough in her to notice. No one but him, her boss, Reinar.

Later he told her that he had known that her reaction was not the flinching movement of a person surprised by being suddenly touched. He instantly understood what no one else had been bothered to see before. Not in all of her, then, 17 year-old life. She was the victim of long lasting domestic abuse. And when he had asked about what had happened, about the blood, she had told him without hesitation.

"I've killed my partner. I have ended it all. Never again will any of them hurt me."

She re-felt her whole body shaking uncontrollably. Reinar had taken her in his arms. Enveloped

her in the first warm embrace she had ever experienced, and he held her there until she cried, until she went limp, and then he had carried her to the sofa in the small room behind the meeting room and sat there, just sat there, close, until she slept.

He was there when she woke, having had several bags of clothing brought for her. That night they had burned the stained ones, the bad blood of her old life, and she had never looked back. She had always stayed faithful to working for him. She had forged her purpose in life to following his orders more than to the actual cause of the Reactionist movement. She didn't mind fighting for the Reactionists. Not at all. Crippling this blind society which had never seen her, never recognized her needs and her vulnerable position as a little child in her abusive home.

For her it wasn't essential if the Reactionists were right or wrong. She never dwelled on practical or sociological matters of the world. The only thing she knew was that they had never done anything for her, so for all she cared they could all burn. She had someone who looked out for her and that pull was what finally had made her feel helpful and included. That was all she needed.

She shook off the memories, re-burying them with hateful satisfaction, re-focusing on enjoying the beauty of the sites and the underlying rush of the intoxication of the buzz she felt before carrying out a mission for the boss.

The meeting point was an hour away and as tourists among tourists her rendezvous and herself would blend in over at the old ruins of an ancient but modernized adventure park. This would be a good ride in more ways than one. She loved a terrifying roller-coaster scare and longed for a good fill of roasted almonds.

Later that evening, having successfully smuggled the first half of the organic key onboard, she went ashore again. This time to pick up some pre-ordered supplies and also the other half of the key's components. Everything went smoothly. Now her boss would have what he needed for enacting what he called the 'Endgame'. She didn't know what it was, she didn't care what it meant for him or his future. Her feelings for even that person had never gone that deep. She had never developed the ability to care for someone else in that sense. She was always in his debt, but would

be fine with setting up a new life when he was gone. A completely different future from the past which she had led these past 36 years.

She would always be just fine.

RAISIE

Raisie always made herself as comfortable as possible when visiting Angela, wherever her mother was being detained. Unfortunately most visits with her the last two decades had been of this nature. About four decades ago, Angela had been detained for the first time and since then, this procedure had become a part of Raisie's life. That year, her practical job courses had begun, during which she was going to make a decision about what would be her first choice of career training. Probably her upbringing, with her mother's constant propaganda lectures, and then the event of her first incarceration for sabotage was what had brought Raisie's choice of work into place for her. She had pursued studies and practical trainee positions within the fields of law, social behavior and rehabilitation with a determination and focus which she had never wavered from during her whole life.

It had been a tough blow to be told that her mother was involved in such society-crippling activities. She'd decided, that very first and long-ago time, to make the best of that heart-breaking situation. As the years went by and the realization set in that her mother would never back down, refusing to recognize the improvements that were clearly very favorable to mankind, Raisie had eventually been forced to let go of the hope that her mother would be a part of her world.

So now, she nurtured love for the woman instead, trying to see the wounded child within her edgy parent. Trying to understand and fathom all that the once-little Angela had lost and to keep in mind that these sorrows and bereavements were current and very real pains which her mother hadn't been

able to move past. Angela's controlled posture was, as always, the embodied tale of her clinging painfully tightly to what she perceived to be safety and truth.

Raisie had always been able to see the frightened child crouching inside her mother. Abandonment and suppressed fear leaking out plainly for Raisie to see. The instinctive bond with her parent let her see the unmasked despair in Angela's beautiful eyes. Other people often misjudged that look as harsh authority, but Raisie knew better. She had seen the sorrows unchained at times when Angela had broken down in those moments of total loss of control. She knew the emptiness that resided beneath that seemingly composed set of manners.

She smiled momentarily and with warmth, spontaneously enjoying the feeling of strong love that she held for this woman. After a lot of soul-searching and self-help meetings, Raisie could completely and honestly say that she did feel love for Angela. Gladly, this day, she actually got a response when Angela turned around and smiled back at her. Why that was, she didn't even stop to analyze, she only observed it happening and relished the joy it brought her. What went on in Angela's head was known to no-one. Raisie believed that even Angela herself didn't know half of where her thoughts, emotions and impulses came from. Raisie knew from experience that if her mother had been able to know herself, she would have been capable of knowing other human beings as well, and that would automatically have allowed her to see and be joyous for the increasing stability and prosperity of the world. The bettering of humanity that was springing forward.

She processed all this in milli-seconds while curling up in the spacious armchair. She cosied herself in, resting her free arm on the curved armrest, unknowingly stroking the soft fabric and taking a deep breath. Absentmindedly, she traced her fingers along the outlines of the sparsely-printed flowers as her mind's eye soaked in their gentle pastel nuances, inducing in herself a calming effect of presence. With the other hand she accepted a large cup of scalding blueberry tea, which spread a scent that brought a feeling of the late summer days to come. Her mind drifted off into the patient mindset of picking berries, still tracing the flowers. This was how she coped with

being here with this destructive and egocentric person, whom she loved so.

When Angela swept her bathrobe up with her onto the sofa across from her, Raisie's pulse hardly quickened and the concerned smile she offered her mother was genuine. The recent rainfalls were still enhancing the scents of grass and nearby woods, helping entwine the room with the landscape outside the open French doors. The only thing disrupting the sense of connectivity with the outside world was the slightly shimmering air above the edges of the patio railings. Those tell-tale signs of an almost invisible net of electronic bars along the detention apartment's boundaries. These were in place to keep her mother from fleeing, which she was most possibly hoping to do. Angela had numerous previously successful escapes from detention holdings.

"So, how was breakfast today, Mom?"

Squinting back at her Angela smiled:

"Well, not all that bad actually. I just miss the variety I ought to be able to choose from. You know." She sighed and winked at her daughter.

"As always, eh, mother? Missing the old, refusing to work with the new?"

"Yes, as ever, Darling. It's kind of nice to be back, though. The martyr status suits our purpose. I'm sure Ray is enjoying himself too. And he needs the rest." Her mother assessed her through lowered eye lids for any impact her comment had made. Raisie knew it was to check if her nerves were in sensitive mode today. Noticing they weren't - her mother had the instinctive bond with her too, the crude old lady laid off that line of approach and continued.

"I hope we made some headlines?" Raisie didn't take that bait either and Angela made a face.

"Come on, Darling, give me something here. I'm starving!"

"No, Mom. Not today and, if I can help it, not ever again. I'm done with that draining way of communicating with you. And so is the whole PDD. You're going to be here for a while now and then you'll be relocated to one of the completely closed communities. I was told there will be more permanent action taken after this strike of yours. I'm sorry, Mother, but you know, really not sorry. You'll still have more personal freedom there than here, and it is going to stop you from traveling

and communicating. You will have your own garden and a two-bedroom villa, I guess. That's the standard for incorrigible and extravagant little old ladies." They both chuckled at that. Then, suddenly, Angela's face showed her beyond-centurial age and more. With the tireless and, what she must subconsciously know to be a futile, fight she was putting up, her aging wore more on her body than on others her age. She looked how people usually did in their 120s. The dissatisfaction and bitterness also took their toll.

"I suppose communications from here are also out of the question, then?"

"Yes, Mother. Of course. But I guess you had to ask. Ray is under the same restrictions. We're hoping that he will come around in time, but for you I think this was the last straw. You will not be believed or given even a remote chance again. These closed communities are very humane, you know. Compare them with the long-term prisons a hundred years ago when you would only get the one cell with your toilet in it (!) and criminals were completely isolated in a huge, gray complex with clocked leisure time in a cemented yard. Now you'll be able to take walks, tend your garden and even grow stuff. You can have the variety of fresh vegetables you're always rooting for. Even your shopping will be completely in keeping with your own requirements within your budget. Which is more than you can consume and it's the same as anyone else's in there."

Her mother audibly frowned.

"Budget!" She spat. "Why should I be limited by a budget? I was born with wealth that would never have forced me to be tied down by such a poor person's thing!" Her mother made the sourest of lemon faces, pouting in the way that only one person Raisie had met in her whole life could do. Except for small children of course.

To see an adult acting that way always turned her stomach. That expression declared that Angela believed herself to be an individual separate from everyone else. Of being especially special and entitled to exclusive privileges. Raisie didn't go there – she didn't get into those arguments anymore. Not even with Ray. Well, almost never with Ray. Sometimes she just had to stand up for what was true. But not with Angela. She knew that her mind was rigidly closed off to new ideas.

When even the indisputable proof of the world having become a thriving place for humans today wouldn't affect anything between her mother's ears, she'd given up. All the despair and tears and countless, utterly futile attempts to discuss these things with Angela had always ended in Raisie crashing head first into a brick wall until finally, one day, this truth had sunk in. So, no more. She chose her battles with better discernment these days. Now, with their escalating harmful actions combined with the danger they posed to other people, Raisie didn't even get an urge to lash out. What she truly felt though was sorrow.

For a few seconds she saw her mother almost as if through the eyes of an outsider. She admired without pre-formed judgement this small but graciously muscular lady with her 160 cm height and thick, whitening hair perfectly placed into a ruffled, unruly hairdo. A sharp and perfect-sized nose and green, intellectual eyes with squinting marks that furrowed deep into her timelessly beautiful face. A gorgeous, natural and wholesome appearance that did not reflect the values beneath. What gave her away was the always-controlled body language and the clear, piercing eyes that were constantly assessing her surroundings.

Feeling herself being scrutinized, Angela got up from the couch and retook her spot by the window with her back to her child.

Raisie realised that her patience was drying up.

"I hope you have a nice afternoon, Mommy. I hear there will be roast halloumi or fish and chips in the garden for dinner. Maybe you will enjoy that?" Being honest and setting boundaries for the whining was also an act of love for this greedy little spoiled person. She found herself smiling again. Incredible how far she had come with herself from the relationship she'd had, or rather not been able to have, with Angela just 5 years ago.

"I have to go. I'll see you after the weekend."

She rose and went over to the person who had given her life, kissed her on the forehead and stroked her mother's hand for a brief moment.

"I do love you, Mother, you know that. I'll see you soon."

She saw the small tears in the corners of Angelas' eyes, stroked her cheek and turned for the door.

"I wish it all could have turned out the way it was meant to, dear child. I wish you could have had what I wanted for you. Not this!" Angela sighed, self-pityingly. That explained the tears, then.

"Mother, I am perfectly happy. The world is changing for the better, Mom."

She turned around to see the middle-aged woman walking out through the patio doors, maybe looking at the garden beyond, but most probably focusing inward, gazing into her own mind, grieving various gardens of her imagined glorious past. This was the real Angela. Dreaming of the unattainable and the things she missed, reminiscing about her childhood's extravagance. Raisie felt a burst of gratitude for her own daily practice of savoring the now and of building for a remarkable future on Earth. How sad to be lost in things and times that weren't real anymore. Yearning for futures that held only empty, superficial desires. Despairing for a world that would only have been a wasteland. Just like the people of the past who had dreamt of colonizing other planets before they had even been able to cultivate the ability to create a thriving colony on their own world. Where is the truth and logic in that kind of mania?

She gave an affectionate wave from the doorway. As she would to her children when leaving them at the daycare centre.

"Love you, Mother! See you soon!"

Angela didn't look but answered with a soft, almost inaudible murmur, reclining against the headrest of a sun lounger she'd sunk into. Raise saw her firmly closing her eyes as if to shut out this whole new, wide and nonsensical world. She hoped her mother would get some rest.

LUCIA

} I've been thinking a lot about my grandmother on my father's side these last few days. She

and I spent long and wonderful times together. I remember how she always marvelously stocked our picnic baskets, which we would devour on fantastically panoramic hilltops or in lush clearings in whispering woods. And then there was my favorite, by the seaside, enthusiastically fighting off seagulls and scooping up picnic blankets in a panic, wildly relocating further inland to save everything from wayward tides. The seagulls were always difficult for me to shoo away because I really did believe in Jonathan Livingston Seagull for ever so long in my youth. Such a beautiful story.

I don't know how it's possible that I only recently realized that I embarked on this journey of abandoning my ancestral path a lot thanks to her and, believe it or not, also to my grandfather. Growing up hearing them advocating such startlingly opposing viewpoints forced my thinking processes to develop a talent for comparison and then fact-checking more than I would have been compelled to do without them in my life.

My earliest memories of my father's father are of him telling me about our family's entitlement. His firm belief was that ruling over other, lesser persons because of one's financial wealth was coded into our genes (!) and that most people on Earth were created to be bossed about and to perform rough, low-waged labor.

"It is the only way they will be encouraged to do an honest day's work," he claimed, matter-of-factly, and I swear I could hear a patronizing shrug in his voice.

My grandmother, on the other hand, was very open to modern research and argued the positive effects for society when all citizens were able to eat healthily along with proper schooling and housing.

They divorced quite early but he stayed on in the mansion's left wing and she in the right. Neither of them ever remarried. Listening to them debate matters of humanity and people's worth were probably the most important lectures I ever attended in my childhood and youth. Well, now that I think of it, probably in my whole life.

The difference between the opinions they had were as stark as midday and midnight. He was very

forceful in what I have recently understood to be his obsession with rigid self-sufficiency. A trait which sadly closed him off from close inter-human relationships. Be it friends, family or foes. She, on the other hand, was very intelligent, short-tempered and open-minded but not always humble about other people's points of view. Come to think of it, I believe that she actually was humble though, because she showed me that humility is also standing firm and holding fast to one's beliefs. Why she was so "undefeatable" in debates was that she never wavered when it came to self-evident humanitarian boundaries. She never gave in or pretended if she didn't agree. She virtually shone when elitist people tried to sound clever, reciting theories or repeating slogans and propaganda that had been emptied of substance since at least a 1000 years earlier, if they had even ever been true to begin with. She could justly hammer down on anything that was non-humanitarian and I think she could do that because of her ability to sort through the correct facts and her instinctive allergy to BS.

"I can never for the life of me understand why people have to pay for education or professional training when the functions all people fulfill in society are absolute necessities for our very existence. Think about how quality schooling for all humans would benefit this miraculous little blue ball of ours (her meaning Earth of course) and how it would further the magnificent enterprise of Homo sapiens' intellectual and progressional development! That kind of evolution is the progress which would finally make our race bloom! Look at the world today!" She threw her arms wide, almost smacking me in the face. "Madness is what's going on! Sheer madness, Lucia! I'm so happy that people are finally waking up to it!"

The scoffs and scorn her views would generate from my grandfather, especially when there was a gathering of some kind or other, were to my understanding the grunts and mockery of a scared old man. I never understood what he, who had more material assail than anyone in our circles, would have to be that scared about. Why would he need to assault and belittle research that proved the benefits that ensued when individuals got better living conditions? And arguing against it with such force! Even as a small child I reacted against his unwillingness to consider other ways of managing

the world we live in. I have later understood that he was unable to rethink and open up to a genuinely generous mind-set.

My grandma could refer to research which proved that societies with more equal conditions were both more industrious and productive and, generally, more successful and inventive. Both for the individuals and the society as a whole. There were facts that triggered deeply ferocious outbursts from my grandfather. These were the studies which showed that societies and companies that had ventured into trying out even the smallest baby steps at lessening the social gaps had become unquestionably more innovative, economically stable and across all professions showed more effective efforts by staff at all levels in the workplace.

He would actually look quite unhealthy when he got his engine up and steaming. He would grin contemptuously, trying to convince anyone who listened, his stature hovering as if he was an all-knowing being, discarding facts and making crude remarks about the naivety of Grandmother and her “crowd”. I could never get him to satisfactorily explain the essence of this naivety.

These outbursts of his would always make Grandma glow in a way that only she could. Her empathetic smile, reaching into the hearts of any sized audience, well at least into the couple of tenths of hearts belonging to those in our circles who didn’t block out the depth and power of the human love in her gaze as it met theirs.

The whole show-down between them went so far in the end that he never showed up when he knew that she would be there. He never had any viable arguments and that always left her with the last word. It was as she would often say, letting her eyes twinkle at me as we sat sharing life somewhere grand around the picnic basket:

“Truth never lies, my darling Lucia. ‘Even in the blood spilled by true people slain, the truth always flows freely and unbent.’ In the face of truth, lies will always wither. Wither with contempt, but nonetheless, wither.” ~

RAISIE

Raisie had fled for her office after she had visited Ray and Angela. As always they were refusing to look ahead and assess what was really happening outside their bubble of dissatisfaction. They never looked at the facts or took in the beauty of what the world was evolving into. It was as if it was beyond their capabilities. They weren't interested if things weren't done in the way that Ray and Angela had locked their minds into claiming the world to be. It was as if they fed off the drama they had created in their brains and that that drama had smothered their ability to have dynamic thought processes.

The violence and terror the rebels were causing was never going to turn humanity back into favoring the old corporate traditions which had been based on destructive short-sightedness and non-beneficial administrations with regard to evolutionary principles. A system built on only favoring the few. If you looked at that closely though, even this was a misconception. Those favored few and their offspring in reality weren't being favored at all, since their planet and their own species wasn't.

Incredibly, humanity had set upon this new path with a mindset that completely discarded its' old ways. There had been no need for protests, violence or force when humanity had embarked on this new way of life. People had realized quite quickly that we ourselves have the smarts and the resources to change and evolve. The single person's choices were the complete base for the whole "revolutionary" step. But, of course, not everyone had been willing or able to see the long-term benefits – not then and not now.

She felt a warm sense of pride as her mind wandered to the millions upon millions of people world-wide working within administrations to uphold and better the ways of running their local communities. Administrative workers were the most valued cogs in a support system for those doing their part on the "floor". Be it looking over the maintenance and bettering of the professional

working conditions of a surgeon or a PDD-patroller, a teacher or a janitor – everyone needs the support of administrators to keep things running smoothly.

Regions across the world were booming thanks to the internet and the intelligent and ingenious efforts of administrations. City councils were foremost in place to support developments within all areas of the maintenance required for having well-functioning day-to-day regions with all the wheels in the smoothest possible motion. No one was on city councils to advocate some cause or other or make a name and get a pay-check for themselves. Politicians and bureaucrats on high horses were thankfully nightmares of the past. Be useful, show functional results in real life or pick a new career that you are talented to perform. It really was as simple as that. Especially now that education was provided to everyone and that there was no monetary cost or shame involved in having tried for a job that it might turn out you weren't really suited for.

Ray and Angela refused, of course, to see that hierarchy based simply on a person's ability to elbow themselves somewhere was obsolete, not to mention ridiculous and dangerous to people's everyday lives. Now being a professional administrator meant being able to be a resource for creating progress in the workplace.

She was happy that she didn't have the time or even the urge to let her sorrow take her over after having visited them both this day. Instead, she let the love she had for them take first chair and strengthen her. Paradoxically, her emotions healed and got her into a better balance when she thought about and focused on feeling love in the face of her beloved family members' acts of terror.

Ray had been in a terrible mood, ridiculing the most recent changes made to the methods of evaluating earnings and payments. He'd rattled on about humanity being on the verge of chaos now that there was neither stick nor carrot for striving toward higher goals. When she pointed out that algorithms showed globally excelling job performance and that genius economists were brainstorming, constantly reviewing the "carrot" systems so they were being satisfactorily and fairly implemented, he didn't have any valid argumentative comments. As usual he kept repeating the propaganda which he'd clearly swallowed bait and hook.

She hadn't stayed with him long. He was still detoxing. Now she had to regain composure and she took a little time alone for a brief reflection before she was to see Arun. It was also a kind of debriefing for herself before this afternoon's meeting with the resource board. To get into the thinking about investments in materials, office space and professionals within the PDD.

She sat down in the office chair, told the blinds to dim and the chair to tip backwards.

"Extra fluff," she mumbled and felt herself sinking into the expanding memory-cushioned softness. Perfect. She zoned inwards and let her mind's flow take off.

How to value the time a person puts into studying or professional labor and turn that into fair models of converting those efforts into various earnings had begun very early in the process of creating a functioning world from the old discriminatory mold. Housing, food and education were baked in as accepted basic rights for all. So far so good. Then, the economic experts had begun to face real challenges when they worked on creating conversions for earnings into spending on specific areas.

How to fairly evaluate work and study efforts, firstly into accumulated free time and secondly, into earnings meant for spending on personal luxury, such as material extravagance or experiencing adventurous leisure time on, say, travels by air, sea or space cruises.

More resource-friendly recreational activities such as gym, swimming or yoga were easily covered within the basic norm but when it came to lavish pleasantries there was a need for personal saving and striving. How best to save and strive for luxury was albeit easier to achieve these days than it had been even for an upper-middle-class citizen in the old "first world" countries, but the conversion did present a huge challenge. The exchange of work efforts into the usage of more luxurious resources was not easy.

For these economic scientists, the input that any single person makes to their updating of this conversion process is invaluable. For them to be able to realistically evaluate the intensity of different work efforts and create a current table that can be easily used by citizens is a task for geniuses. Luckily the world has turned out to be full of those!

To calculate what a person has accumulated in free time and for spending on happiness and fun actually became a course on university level in the mid-2040s – it made her smile to think about the priorities of her world.

Raisie always took the time to give her opinions and input to these scientists because it was the responsible thing to do. Truthfully, though, what motivated her most to sit down and answer the online forms was simply that she loved to have extravagance and travels in her life.

If she hadn't been born into this kind of world she would surely have been a workaholic careerist with a huge savings account. Kicking downward and clawing upward just to be able to get herself beautiful things and a lot of free time for adventurous kicks. She winced at the idea of the backward way of life she would have had to lead back in the day – what a stressful and pressured lifestyle it would have been.

She hardly had the stamina to let herself imagine the “if she” had been born 150 years ago into a struggling family or a geographical area that had limited her chances of ever being able to afford or even have time left over to get a basic education. She groaned loudly at the thought of all the humans born back then, having had the brains, which people do, but not to have been *lucky* enough to have been born into having the prerequisites for becoming an accomplished professional. To have had the resources of her abilities go to waste.

A person's ability to be a significant part of society, enriching and valuable, but their potential never even getting to see the light of day. This was a horrible thought to her. She shuddered at how off-point humanity had been only such a short time ago. She might never have seen the sea or visited another continent. Such normal things that were so natural for everyone to get to do often nowadays.

The beauty of taking the best bits of the three major societal “-isms” - capitalism, socialism and communism and blending them into a great, big, constantly expanding brew of bringing out the best in Homo sapiens was a magnificent time to be a part of! Administrators of today are doing what they should have been doing since forever, she thought - being a resource to improve and expand

healthy platforms for sustaining people so that they can do their best at work as well as in their free time and, of course, for the environment. She believed that the recent decades of progress along with the genius of mankind was attracting humanity into *choosing* to evolve. Individuals moving forward, thriving as responsible equals.

If only the elitist Reactionists could see this. If only her child and mother could see this! But, instead of opening their minds to admitting that the world of today worked just fine and was constantly taking inventory and steps to improve, Ray and Angela were stuck, obsessing about “reclaiming” places, positions and things that weren’t theirs to hoard anymore. Ray was even craving things that had never been in the family for as long as he had lived.

The worst thing wasn’t their craving for material things, even though it was irritating because they could have mounds of luxuries today if they only chose to work for it like everybody else. As long as you played whichever part you were capable of to keep the wheels of the world turning there were no limits to the material beauty and adventures you could enjoy.

What really got to her was the elitists’ beliefs that they were actually more deserving and valuable human beings than the next. She knew that putting idols on pedestals had been behavioral necessities which had kept Homo sapiens alive and thriving during the initial vast expansions of the race. But that was way back when our idols actually had possessed capabilities that enriched their group.

With the current developments of beneficial management, humanity was finally blossoming beyond mere elbowing along for survival. She smiled to herself.

“We are finally living in societies that are being managed to nourish the development of our vast and, finally, untethered potential. We are a remarkably innovative species,” she thought.

Evolution couldn’t have happened any other way, she supposed. From group awareness to evolving into individually responsible grown-ups had had to be a several-millennia-long process. She was always so thankful that humanity had awoken from the coma of servitude to false idols and broken off its procrastination in time! And also that the internet had been invented which had made

the process possible at all. The ultimate tool to simplify and support this giant leap forward.

She accepted that she, as well as every other person on Earth, had instinctive thought patterns which shouted for either being “better” or “more worthy” than others. But to evolve, to use our brains and their magnificent talent for logic to implement actually useful delegation and supervision models, *that* needed intelligent administrators. Humanity had embarked on that path now.

These times were the beginnings of tapping into the potential within ourselves and making good use of this plentiful planet of ours. To have scientists planning for the good of the global “tribe”. Social, behavioral and resource-planning scientists working with the constant input of all people in it. Creating beneficial societies for the prospering individuals of a modern world. Promoting the evolution of the intelligence of Homo sapiens.

Ray had just laughed in her face earlier when she had told him the latest news of the successful fungi projects and the spreading of forests in Africa. They had travelled there a lot when he was a child. Often, when she hoped to connect with him nowadays, she would try to awaken those feelings of joy and contentment he’d expressed back then. She didn’t know if it brought him happiness to remember those carefree days, but she could hope. She felt empathy for him, for how isolated and scared he must be behind that arrogant mask which he so frantically upheld. She could see the effects of the drugs weakening his performance of that forced persona and would try to reach him then, when he was vulnerable. But as soon as she tried the most basic forms of normal polite exchange, he bricked up a barrier between them. Making as if he were something more than just a person talking to another person.

It was a characteristic of hubris - and hubris, paradoxically, being a symptom of a lack of healthy self-esteem. He didn’t know these basic human traits in himself, she would sadly reflect. He had never gone into depths with his personal inventory. Like Angela, Ray didn’t have the basic self-awareness to realize where his reactions sprang from.

A few years back, the pieces of this puzzle had begun to lay themselves out for her and the despair for her child had since then ebbed and transformed into mostly empathy and sorrow. As a

result, she had gone into her own depths to understand the true face of human hubris and then the understanding of humanity's millennia-old worship of startlingly useless leaders had begun to fall into a more comfortable place. An understanding beyond the mere theoretical.

The attraction to that kind of "false charisma" was what had been racing humanity toward the brink of annihilation. Thankfully, the patterns of worshipping empty shells had been clearly weakened when people had begun to develop personal responsibility. Even in such a short time as this past, single century, the ability to discern empty words from actual qualitative results had become obvious due to people understanding what real responsibility was all about because of practicing it for themselves. Thousands of years of dis-habits don't change easily, but evidently incredibly much more easily than anyone had predicted!

Yes, one human at a time, the human race is one brilliant species.

Patterns of behavior had been passed down to her, and to her children. All three kids had spent the same amount of time with Angela in the archipelago during their early childhood. All of them had been fed illusions of inherited grandeur and indisputable entitlement. Yet, only Ray had been pulled into that destructive, excluding mindset. Raisie would never be able to understand why, but small revelations of the whole picture came to her now and then. She was grateful for that and could actually feel content with those crumbs, most of the time.

She began pulling herself out of these deep reflections. Gratitude was always the perfect way to begin resurfacing back into the now. She felt strengthened. Back to the common sense of things. The sorrow that often overwhelmed her when Ray had run amok made these hard-core, reflective mind-mapping sessions necessary to get her back into harmony. She had grounded herself and rose to take care of what lay ahead for this day.

She started out by leaving the PDD to go to see Arun. She had known that she would be summoned soon and today, just after she'd left Ray, the message had arrived. In four days they were uniting for a top-secret conference but she would hopefully be leaving in a few hours, to get a few days to herself. The severity of the conference was an adrenalin rush for her and, with

everything going on with her family right now, she had to admit the job was just what she needed to get her mind off things. Even though the summit would be of a most terrifying nature, she knew it was also of a most important one and she was honored to be involved. These destructive actions had to be snuffed out.

She wondered if she would ever be allowed to tell Arun. She wondered if he would ever forgive her double life. Her lies. If the reason for her deception would as be great to him as it was to her so that he could understand why he had been fed cover stories these last three years. Maybe he could understand but not forgive.

RAY

“Ray. Nay, nay. That’s all they have to say. Every single day – it’s all a bunch of nays!”

He smiled a crooked smile at the remembrance of the first time his grandma had chanted that to him. He had laughed out loud because in his mind he had imagined horses neighing at him – “neigh, neigh, neigh” – shaking their big heads with wildly flowing manes, the horses’ faces looking like his parents and siblings, even like some of the teachers at his daycare center. He just hadn’t been able to stop laughing. Angela had scooped him up and they had twirled for what had seemed like forever. He really loved her! And she really loved him. She was the best. They all just didn’t understand. This dream world of theirs would die out. The truth of the masses’ laziness and stupidity would become apparent and, hopefully, at the fall of mankind, there would be people like his Grandma and him ready to take charge again. He was so lucky to have had her. To have someone so intellectual tell him about the way humans really were. He had only ever had her to always be there to listen to him. The logic as to why humanity had survived this long was evident. The strong and forceful taking charge, always leading the mindless masses forward. Why would

they want to mess with such a winning concept?!

He was terribly shaky and focused on their struggle and companionship to pull through every single minute right now. Soon the medication would arrive. His body and mind were screaming for it. This was not good. Okay – focus! He continued his workout on the cross trainer.

He really hoped their small diversions kept the departments of “order” distracted. It had been a rough weekend. He actually hoped that he would be held here for a while now. The drugs weren’t really working anymore and his body had taken a lot of damage from all the shit he’d put into it these past few years.

It really seemed as if they bought into his destructive routine. Amateurs! The compassion that drove this “reforming” of the world was blinding them all. So f-ing easy to manipulate! Thankfully enough. He wasn’t an addict, not the way they thought. He could stop whenever he chose to. Just as long as they helped him off the stuff and let him have medication so he could handle their stupidity when they drove him mad. Sometimes he just needed to fake a tantrum if he needed to relax for a bit. The little nurses would come running with magic pills. Well, most times, and if not he would just up the drama a bit. Theatrical work well performed always deserved him a chemical break. The emotional and social training groups they always put him in were mind-fuckingly tedious at times. He could only fake “recovery” for a certain amount of time, for G’s sake!

Well, those sessions were not happening for a while yet. With him having arrived just this morning the coming week or two would be a little paradise vacation of prescribed medication. They had to support his body safely until the drugs were cleaned out of his system.

Yeah, right, focus! He wouldn’t get any word in about the outside progression. The results of the work they had put in were still in the making, a week or so away. He might as well relax. He got off the machine and started core exercises while drinking some nutrients. To get through the detox with exercise was a trick he’d been made aware of at the recovery meetings – so something good had come out of those stupid gatherings.

Compared to what he had read about the prison food in the old-time versions of PDDs, he was

grateful at being locked up in the correctional facilities of today. He guessed that some of the reforms were keepers when society went back to the natural order. Or maybe not. It wasn't really working at punishing him into rethinking his "rebellious" ways. He snorted out loud, loving picturing the lies he fed them here. Well, things like reshaping stuff like this he would be leaving to others. He was going to live the good life in the glorious future. Oh, yeah. Bossing was his forte as his grandma used to tell him. That was something he knew he would really enjoy!

ARUN

He put the diary down. Raisie had brought it to him, pushing it toward him across the desk at his office with close-bitten determination. He could see that she was tired by her slouched posture, giving away her sense of powerlessness. The bent back of numbness of a cornered soul. He was glad to see that she had finally cried. To put a lid on things was a shared generational heritage from both their families.

She had nodded at the book on the table, giving it a pointing glance.

"She's helped me put at least some of the pain of all this into words. Across the generations she tells of the same meltdown of emotions and intellect. At least giving the inexplicable some faint outline. Overtures to, I dunno, perhaps someday, understanding. I can't wait to read the rest but I really think you should have it for now. I photographed a lot of pages so I'll have a few chapters to read on the go. If I find the urge to. I need a break to just let things sink in for a bit. Could I suggest you read, at least, these passages, the ones I've marked here?"

She absentmindedly flicked her index finger along quite a few colored strips of paper sticking out from various spaces throughout his great-mother-in-law's thick and very-worn private journal.

"She went through what we are as a parent and with most of her close family and relatives. Seeing

how they were all tied up in the beginnings of the Bettering and how most people in those circles were shocked. The whole family had initially shown harsh resistance to being bereft of their way of life. The dismantling of all that was known to them. I also skipped ahead to get some hope and to try to understand how she managed to cope and keep her priorities straight.” She shot him a weak grin. “Well, anyway, I’ll leave it for you. I’ve decided to take a few days’ leave. I’ve got at least three months saved up from overtime these last ten months.”

They both shook their heads in unison, giving each other a resigned but knowing chuckle. Arun was due some serious leisure time too. He let her go on. He knew she needed to just get to keep speaking.

“I’m going to Tenerife to do some trekking and diving. Get the silence and seclusion up on Teide for a few days first. I’ll check if there are any available spots for a secluded stay when I get home. I’ll only be away for a couple of weeks with all that’s going on with Ray, but there’s nothing more for me to do here now. I’ll call him as often as he’ll be allowed, though.”

He rose and went around the desk to hold her. He felt as she sank into his chest and she let out a hushed moan, the sound of a wounded animal. Sobbing, opening the gates to let out the indescribable hurt again.

“Hey, Raisie! You’ll get through this, my love. You will. We will. And so will they. Take the trip and if Tenerife isn’t available, just go wherever. Doing good things for yourself, darling – that’s great! Talk about progress. Get away. Relax. Contemplate. While you’re away we’ll hopefully find out what they’ve been up to and then you’ll have lots to keep you busy when you get back.” As he said this he pulled back slightly and rubbed noses with her while making a sad clown’s smile. He kissed her forehead and looked deeply into the beautiful eyes of his partner. He spoke softly.

“Sometimes I allow myself to suppress this shit storm and just enjoy living. A positive mind wipe, if you will. Otherwise I would just have to go bury myself some days, you know? Well, I don’t have to tell you, do I? If anyone, you taught me this. You know how to make it through. I know you do.”

When he finally got a smile back he realised how sorely he had needed a smile from her. To share some love and hope. Today was a yo-yo of contradicting emotions exploding in sudden, unforeseen bursts. Right before she'd entered his office he'd just wanted to tear something down and now her smile made him an anchor. And even if the bottom was shifting and far below, he would soon find a solid point to catch it onto.

He had been in this situation before, but this time it felt as if there was more danger lingering, like there was a constant alert and gnawing sensation in the back of his mind. Was it something he had unconsciously registered in Ray's or Angela's posture or in a dodged glance? Was it something one of them had said, or maybe not said? He had to get focused, which wasn't easy with his broken, bleeding and roaring heart taking a huge toll on his energy this day. It was also something he had experienced before – the first day or so after Ray had been apprehended were always the worst.

That Raisie was going away for a bit felt like a good step toward getting some weight of the load off. He wasn't as good as she was at looking out for his own wellbeing. He often lost track of himself by trying to fix others and he impulsively fell into that sort of behavior much easier when he was out of balance. Like now.

"Leave and I will keep an eye on this business with Ray and your mother. We'll do our best to find out the details of what they've been up to, Raisie. The investigative unit leader sent me a message earlier. They're digging deeper as we speak."

He thought he noticed that she too had an elevated sense of disturbance. More so than the previous times they'd been in this situation. Maybe it was all in his head, but when they nodded silent agreement at each other he read into the underlying atmosphere that they both knew something was amiss. Something was definitely worse than before. In his memory the tone and posture of both Ray and Angela became clearer and today both of them had signaled some unspoken edge of expectation. With those two and their allies that was not a good thing. He didn't say anything out loud. He wanted his beautiful Raisie to have as little more to worry about as possible.

He watched her as she approached the door to leave, turning around and blowing him a kiss. Then his throat turned into a knot. Why was this happening to them? He didn't like the bitterness he'd been experiencing of late and had focused many meditations on the fact that he was a human being and that to be bitter was a basic human emotion. Better to let himself feel the feeling in a meditation and see it through to lessen its' grip on him than keeping it pressed down, confined inside him.

He spontaneously went to her again and they embraced one more time and then she was off, out the door and away. He missed her already.

Raisie's job was with the correctional department. She worked with reviewing and creating new, more complex types of laws, correctional methods and guidelines. In the building where she had her office was where the PDD had scientific, legislative and constructive teams of the larger region under one roof. Personnel specialized and cooperated on all levels regarding all types of disturbing and dangerous activities. Guidelines and risk assessments were being carefully and constantly reviewed, redefined and bettered. Under this department fell the developing of new forms of rehabilitation and detention for all types of criminals. Discarding and promoting successful treatments for violent offenders, addicts, issues where people were overstepping and endangering others, possession and resource-related overstepping of boundaries and rules and, well, pretty much every thinkable criminal behavior.

For her to have one of their children and her mother this deeply involved in the very problems she was facing in her every day job must be like a doubling-up nightmare. He couldn't begin to imagine. He wished her a well-deserved and recuperating break.

LUCIA

Given the workaholic I am most entries here are about practical things, but this morning I read about a nature reserve where the success rate of protecting and breeding a vast diversity of species was featured. This brought me instantly into memories from the Africa of my childhood and even though the joy I felt is a much more comfortable emotion, I was also assailed by other recollections from the past. I especially remember an occasion in the Room of Photographs.

The room was filled with mingling guests. Tables had been moved in earlier that day and they were stacked with delicious dishes and beverages. We were hosting a small gathering for the family and some of our closest acquaintances. Before uncovering a newly arranged wall of photographs, my mother was giving a toast in her official charismatic manner. She smiled, lifting her glass high and twinkling her eyes in the way that had always made my heart so soft and warm.

“Dear guests and family, this evening we have a display which might cause some of you some trifling distress, but please remember that we were put on this planet to rule.” Raised eyebrows, smug smiles and a soft murmur underlined her statement. “We, who have joined together this evening are of the ruling class and, as human beings, we are also the undisputed rulers of Earth’s creatures. Even the poorest of humans must eat, so it is our birthright and our trail to survival as well as to grandeur. That we do some things for the thrill and adventure is our privilege – we, the not-so-poorest,” she batted her eyelashes at the assembled small crowd, while smiling her seductively crooked grin and, on cue, received hearty chuckles and giggles.

“As a welcome back from the savannah to our beloved children, Adele and Cris, please come up here and do the honors of cutting the ribbon.” Applause followed, as my carefully coreographed

siblings entered the scene and the light and focus turned onto the curtain as down it went.

I had seen these kinds of pictures before, they hung in this very room, but they had seemed so old. Too distant to be felt real. I realized that I had blocked them out as non-relevant relics of a time that wasn't my own and subconsciously simply shut out the repelling effect they otherwise would have had on me. But now, with the sharpness and life-resemblance conveyed by the latest technology, the image that was blown up on the wall before us pierced my brain with the harshness of an assault. Portraying both my siblings, kneeling, smiling triumphantly, hands resting on trampled grass, near blood, grinning while pressing their palms on the carcass, as if claiming the dead elephant. Their eyes and teeth showing no shame, only boastful prestige.

"No! You didn't!" The words sliced through the room in the millisecond of silence before the gathering had the chance to express their awe. A few scattered, escaped claps dissolved into the sudden, thicker silence, and heads were turning as quick as a gazelle's at hearing disturbance in the bush. I instinctively registered a few glances of guilt but mostly I was targeted with repelled disgust.

My brother's and sister's shame shone through, but the arguments they had fed themselves, and no doubt been fed with, had clearly overridden the childhood principles we had been so fervently in agreement about. In my mind's eye I saw us on the ranch in Botswana, playing around with the newborn elephant baby, caring for the zebras who came to share the horse's rations, lurking carefully outside the fence enclosing the stables.

"How could you? Do you even remember compassion anymore?" The words I shouted at them came out in a tone that cut through my heart.

Their silence, their hard, strained lips and now tears on the brink of my brother's eyelashes made me waver, feeling suddenly as if I were the guilty party. But I knew that that instinctive reaction was a pure childhood impulse of people-pleasing. I stood my ground.

"How the hell could you!?"

I turned, openly crying, hearing my mother getting herself together, beginning to do her thing covering up and apologetically laughing this "scene", or rather me, off. Soothing my siblings,

affirming their choices and netting our guests in that amazingly talented, and well-practised, manipulative way of hers. Sounds of murmurs of agreement, tones expressing regret concerning the not-yet 'folded' one, me again. I had heard them before, so many times, the whispers of closing ranks. I had almost been a part of that fold, enveloped by that false sense of safety and sanity. Their unison echoed silently after me as I ran, their condescending opinions finding their way into my heart throughout the mansion, painfully crushing at my throat.

That was when I solidified my final disengagement from the dysfunction. That was when baby steps toward being my own person with my own principles as well as the beginnings of seeking out others like me took flight.

The magical events and places of the past in our past home in Africa flooded my thoughts. Also images from here, the homeland, of the huge gardens and fowl roaming untouched. I felt deeply nostalgic. They will live in my mind forever, those places. Those places I remember as utopian that never were real other than in the innocent thoughts of the child I had been.

I shall always treasure returning to the estates. I've actually booked a month's stay in one of my favorite cottages in the grounds of an estate for this autumn. It is my absolute best time of year. Listening to the crisp leaves under the soles of my boots, the smells of earth maturing with the breaking down of organic materials and, if I'm lucky, I'll spot a few animals bustling in preparation for the coming season.

Africa is there in my other reality and I will visit again. I have to believe that we will continue bettering the ways of our kind. It's too wondrous a world to let fall back into pursuing chaos. We will continue to further our management of our world responsibly. This, the only life-teeming world we know.

Of course we will see this evolution through.

ARUN

His job was in the Learning Department renewing educational systems. Overseeing the best methods to use to fulfill people's needs, rights and abilities to hopefully get the initial professions best suited to them. In this new age where the expected lifespan was well above 130, most people educated themselves several times, even as adults. Children and young people were treated according to their different skills and challenges and puberty and other matters which affected learning capacity were taken into account in individual educational planning. Talents and genius were flourishing and the most unexpected gifts were revealed. He loved his job!

Implementing the best possible ways to learn in non-stressful and qualitative educational systems was the bottom line of the LD's, the Learning Department's, purpose. To constantly excel in ways to communicate and integrate useful knowledge into human brains, considering the reality of the participants' psyches and emotions.

Something he really enjoyed was finding new prodigies who had a talent for giving relevant feedback on current systems. The most important thing to keep the world excelling in all fields was by adapting the education methods to keep them up to speed with the ever-evolving students in the programs.

The unbound resources of today's world made for not only humans and humanitarian fields evolving, but technology, healthcare, science, well, truly all fields of this era were exploding into wonderfully exciting developments.

The drawing out of talents which the focus on educational freedom and availability had brought forth was beyond what anyone of the early days, even when he had begun working within his field, could ever have hoped to reach. Actually, this amount of constantly mounting innovation within all areas of being human, not to mention the inventions flooding forth, was not what dreams were made of – they were the results of what humanity unleashed was made of.

Now that humanity was cleaning up its act, as well as its oceans, garbage dumps and space rubble,

taking the next steps toward habitats and research centers on the Moon and Mars was finally a responsible step to take. Now that such projects weren't dependent on limitations such as "financing" and thanks to the huge numbers of incredible geniuses, who would never even had been able to access higher levels of study in the old days, the groundwork for making humanity's dreams of the stars come true was well under way. What felt properly good was that the risk of our bringing reckless mis-management to future space exploration and possible habitation was now out of the picture. For him to think of Homo sapiens exporting the irresponsibility of the adolescent human race of the past out to the stars was a core unsettling dystopia. He couldn't even bring himself to think about it for more than fleeting seconds. What horrible images of terror. And to think if this had come about before individual family planning had taken root! Horrifying!

Family planning had been a natural evolutionary step for individuals to take when people had begun getting a factual understanding that childhood, adulthood and the senior years of a person wouldn't be about strife and wouldn't depend on the "luck" of having been born in the right circumstances or having know the right people. Many were also bound by "luck" to be offered handouts for the needed funding for education and professional training because they couldn't pay the huge costs themselves – to imagine that your life's input to society could have been dependent on you being lucky enough to be chosen through a charity! He just couldn't fathom it.

Many people in the past had been scared because you could never be certain if you would be able to support yourself through life and people therefore had many children to secure the family's wellbeing. It was never a safe assumption that you would have a job throughout life. People could actually be out of work! What a stressful place the world must have been then.

Now that people knew for a fact that as long as you pulled your weight, which most people do enjoy, even if you are sickly or old, you are always able to provide for yourself and your family and experience luxuries to boot. The population of Earth had steadily minimized. Raisie and he having three children was rather rare these days.

The LD couldn't take all the credit for family planning becoming a choice. Education definitely

made it possible for a person to choose to have a small or large family without fear of starvation, but much of his department's work rested on huge efforts launched by scientists and humanitarians long before the LD was even founded. Focus on lowering illiteracy, programs for family planning, researchers compiling reports on areas thriving due to the benefits of implementing equality and equity. All these areas had their roots in the hard work put in by individuals from centuries past. For a long time, these forerunners had been terribly undermined by the resistance of forces countering the availability of mandatory, accessible learning and also by those who gained materially from restricting personal freedom through maintaining tight monetary handcuffs, lack of insurance and representation for workers, binding individuals through bank loans and so on.

Several decades after the internet had been invented there had been a very thin line between a complete global lockdown on personal freedom and the global evolution toward the current reality. He felt a constant gratitude toward each and every one of the billions of people back in the early 2000s who had taken personal action forging the change in humanity's destiny. By a hair's breadth and the unwavering determination put into action by the multitudes of consumers during those initial three years, he and his fellow humans now stood just inside the threshold of the most marvellous and truly challenging journey Homo sapiens had ever undertaken.

One of his other favorite fields was the development of methods that helped educators guide the young toward finding their unique talents and qualities. Most young people today possessed a goal to start their working life in a first profession, knowing that later in life they had the possibility to pursue others if they wanted to. The choice to change path could be an urge to enrich your experience but it could also evolve from finding oneself not suited for the current place of work.

Arun thought of the old mold of career planning. That you would very likely be stuck in the same profession, almost like a threat of a ball and chain, for the rest of your adult life. In many parts of the world, mostly depending on your family's monetary or educational status or simply geographical factors, what you would "become" was very possibly something that you weren't even suited for. He shuddered at the thought.

He remembered having a bottomless fear of making the wrong educational choices. His ancient great-great-grandmother had told him about her childhood and how young children and teenagers were locked out of developing their true talents due to their families not being able to afford schooling or assumptions about what someone of their “class” could become. The burning interest for solutions to these kinds of issues had taken root in him at a very early age. He hadn’t been able to stop analyzing and thinking about better solutions for these questions. That was his kind of crazy!

Personally his first career choices had been between acting or educational planning. After having been empathically mirrored by his theatre coach about not really having enough talent to convey believable characters to be able to work as a professional actor, he had licked his wounded ego and gone for this job. Today he was happy that he’d been a mediocre actor back in the day. He wouldn’t want to trade his current professional challenges for the world.

They were tight-knit teams under one roof in the LD. Experienced and new talents working alongside each other, constantly reviewing evaluations of collected experience from current student bodies and teachers. Intertwining new ideas with well-practiced and proven successful methods to create better learning abilities and creativity in thinking processes.

He loved being part of structuring the foundations for providing individually suited educational resources. Of being part of making humanity great and greater. Making it easier to find career paths and discovering what choices that inspire the best potential within a person across physical, mental and psychological preconditions. Easing navigation through jungles of branches within practical and intellectual fields of education. The aim was always to make broader overviews easier to sort through. A challenge that he never got enough of.

Thankfully he was very aware of the tendency towards workaholism that had run through generations in his family. He had worked hard at learning how to plan, prioritize and portion his energy between, on the one hand, work or studies and on the other physical activity, rest, family, leisure, sleep and fun. He remembered it as a difficult practical part of his early training and he still

had to make daily conscious decisions to get up from his desk or make careful preparations and sub-goals for tasks to be able to fit in the other parts of living a life.

He was happy to have been born into this day and age because normal working hours were calculated to a weekly average of 20 to 25 hours during approximately 300 days per year with a standard of 65 days for recuperation. In reality, many people had saved up many more hours because of working overtime when projects needed a continuous work force.

It was expected of everyone to make good use of those vacation days and everyone had to, but taking it easy was not something that came naturally to him. Whether he was studying or working, his maddening love and obsession for his field would probably have taken over his life if he had been a recluse or had no family or colleagues to rein him in. Raisie had the same affliction so they helped each other by making sure they spent their hours of earned leisure time. Yearly, they normally had several months due, which they easily accumulated when projects they worked on suddenly had required 10- to 15-hour days.

He'd developed a love for the outdoors where he could meditate in the most wondrous settings world-wide, he also loved growing stuff, traveling and of course food, he loved eating at Michelin-star restaurants and visited restaurants all over the globe for all-in gourmet sessions! He also acted in amateur theatrical groups and had, if he might say so himself, learnt a lot in the years of pursuing that passion. He was a workaholic for life; he had accepted that and made deliberate choices to relax on a daily basis. He had begun to suspect that he would never move on to learning a second field of work. This career was his goldmine and he was too obsessive about it to even want to be open-minded about doing anything else. He was happily stuck here.



He stuffed the diary Raisie had left him into his backpack and double-checked that the work he was doing was safely saved and backed-up. Then he left the office and walked to the park area surrounding the high-rise. In the old days this part of town had been where lots of angry people had been segregated, some by choice but mostly people just ended up being shoved here by chance. A century ago, constructive research in the field of positive outcomes of habitation factors had been in

its infancy and many human beings, mostly families, had been cemented into a status quo by simply being stacked here, terribly undermined when it came to educational and professional possibilities for their children and themselves. The blindness to these consequences had caused society to shoot itself in both its feet. All those people predestined to be outcasts in those days were the thriving resources and sprouting geniuses of this day. The anger he always felt when thinking about the history of those boroughs made his workaholism even fiercer and he would sneak in work hours to cool off from time to time. He would even lie to Raisie and his family about what he was doing – typical addict behavior.

The global, united actions by foresighted humanitarians such as social and behavioral scientists, educators and talented executives from all sectors had finally brought about change. These were the kinds of workgroups that had bloomed into the various departments of social planning that, among others, had been the seeds of Raisie's and his workplaces. Furthering the evolution of humanity by applying sciences and functional practical solutions. The surge forward that humanity had taken when societies re-forged themselves into being run through the intelligent managements of this day was amazing. It was still twisting, difficult, hair-tearing work and probably always would be if administrations were to be able to keep up with the ever-brighter youth and changing professional dynamics around talent, but like he said – his kind of crazy!

Nowadays these boroughs were very popular homes for families with small children who enjoyed the ease of household chores, the provided daycare centers, the closeness to friends, and nature. The area's apartments were much sought after for municipal planning committees' offices and other administrative purposes as well and, for the convenience, lots of this staff lived here as well. Many others who preferred the quiet life and not too much gardening to tend to when they got older lived here too. Raisie and he had talked about it. Lucia, whose diary he was carrying, had lived here, in this very neighborhood.

Walking along the bicycle path, he veered off into the meadow, making his way through the buzzing high stalks of grass and flowers until he stopped by a large bush. There he pulled the mat

from the side of his backpack and settled down to relax, breathe deeply and soon meditate. The sound of a couple of very elderly men discussing fishing, small children screeching in play and an infant crying defiantly. He took in the sound of someone yelling a loud: “Watch were you’re going, pops”. A smile filled his head, all of this here and now went in with the regular ins and outs of air and slowly rest seeped through his being. Arun settled off into serenity.

“I give thanks for meditation.” This affectionate sigh of gratitude were his last deliberate thoughts before logging in to the depths of his innermost chamber, zoning in for the next half hour or so. Filled with the motion of contemplation.

He let his thoughts drift with his mind’s wanderings. Allowing thoughts to surface, breathing through impulses of judgmental thoughts, observing his attempts at censorship of things being good or bad. Letting thoughts and pain of Ray’s actions come and go, of Raisie, of himself, their other children, of projects, colleagues. Angela’s voice suddenly surfacing, propagating loudly – all these thoughts swinging from front seat loud to fading inaudibility. Arguments he’d actually had and pure mind storms of disputing fiction, confrontations pulling to and fro. Memories of playing with his children and pulsating awe at the vastness of the universe. The now silently moving in as these first moments of mind sweeps lost their hold on him, the now soothing all of his troubles. Pain and wonder of being. Now. In the grass. Hating but loving living, in the midst of all that is. And yet always praising underneath, adoring the multitude of this life.

LUCIA

} The pregnancy is progressing into the fifth month and little Mickey is already beginning his kick-massaging of my innards. Evidently he’s developing hulky-sized muscles in there and with an energy that Angela showed in the eighth month. Already my stamina and concentration are not at

the levels I'm used to.

Angela has stayed far too many hours in the care of the nannies, but I have to devote myself to our work, for her and for the future. I had to leave her alone with the nannies when I was doing my previous jobs too, because I had to work long hours. She looks at me with both sadness and anger and when I try to reach out she shakes me off and changes the subject. She often suggests some kind of adventure. A hike, the zoo or simply going to her friend's house. Sadly I am too often too tired to say yes or even defend my wanting her to stay at home and hang out with me. The nannies have had to step in because I just can't muster the energy to do anything with her. Then there's the problem with me not being able to play games on the computer with her. I daren't risk my sobriety from my gambling and gaming addiction. Going on 9 years now and I'm staying on this path!

I've booked a trip so that just the two of us are getting away for a week soon. It's an indoor water park and we're living inside the dome in a one-bedroom bungalow, so we'll be close whether she wants to be or not.

Oh, I feel that I'm at a dead-end with her sometimes. I understand that she does want to be with me but that her disappointment prevents her from showing me anything but anger right now. I'm so scared that this will be irreparable. I'll have to bring it up with her father again. Especially since our work is at such a critical stage. And, well, it probably will be for many years to come.

Yeah, I need to write this here to get it out of my system, but I'm not sure I will be able to figure out how to save our relationship. Sometimes I wish I could just step away from the work but at this stage it is not an option.

I suck at this! And now with Mickey on the way I just don't know sometimes...



Got a nap in there. I can't think about my shortcomings with Angela right now. Work is at such a critical stage and we're really getting somewhere.

The others in our local workgroup are so intelligent and it is wonderfully inspiring to work

alongside people who are this determined and empowered by unwavering love for our world. I feel extremely fortunate in firstly having been considered to be a part of this growing work force and now actually being a valued cog. The level of common sense and organizational skills are beyond anything I've ever encountered within any administration or executive board before.

I can only continuously keep working, putting one foot in front of the other, in the now. We sat for hours on end in discussions with our regional work group this past weekend. The procrastination of the human race needs to come to an end. Homo sapiens is moving out of the Dark Ages but has huge difficulties acknowledging that fact. I sometimes wonder if it is the energy of working within the whole picture of global perspectives that is back-binding us at everything that would be making us take this step toward our fuller potential. An in-built fear of the unknown? Even though keeping on this path will sink us, with our leaders and idols in fact being the ones who are poisoning the pack, humanity still pushes on behind them.

We know too much now to let purely draining methods be allowed anymore. After the eons since we mindlessly began cutting down the forests of Africa and just kept moving on to cut down the next forest, consuming, consuming, consuming, we've kept at it. But we have now reached an enlightened stage. Either we take responsibility for evolving on an individual level or we stand idly by, again on an individual level, and let our world, our intelligence and enlightenment fall into darkness and worse.

What is happening within this workgroup is that the whole picture of matters is being considered and this seems to bring forth ideas that fit together with other areas as if they were natural pieces of a whole framework, which of course they are. Everything from the needs of the smallest infant, industrial development to the broadest outlines of agricultural development are being covered in the different specialized committees. When the next level of planning connects some of them together to make adjustments the logic of how these fields connect is mind-blowing. Take the two groups of experts from the transport sector and one focusing on the development of education for middle school textbooks – that was a discussion which birthed a process I hardly could have imagined to be

as important as it became.

What inspires this fire of commitment? The scale of planning that sprouts from the seed of everything being a part of a global whole seems to empower this structural build-up, with unparalleled genius within all moves to create administrative outlines. Specialized groups are forming and, in time, the connections between them all. Thank heaven for the internet! This is what I mean by humanity moving out of the Dark Ages – without the internet, this kind of build-up would never have been possible.

Teachers, doctors, nurses, social scientists, scientists, biologists, corporate CEOs, cleaners, secretaries – you name the profession, the workgroups world-wide have got them. And they are all able to compare notes!

The true value of each person's input into a working society has been stagnant. Individual job efforts have only been given market value by an ever-increasing perverse set of markers. All professions are in dire need of being inventoried. Without sanitary technicians for example, we would be sick a lot more than we are today. Without teachers, our children would be incapable of furthering our species, of bringing us to new and soaring heights. The majority of the world's workforce is being degraded as less worthy – the sewing of beautiful garments in a factory is seen as less than managing an office but which is truly of less value than the other? My whole social life is built on a base of my enjoying what I wear. Many hours of my week are spent in clothes that I like - and that is valuable to me.

Now I need to get some structure into what has been going on at work. Too many things are swimming in my head after we had our first global conference this past month.

The discussions had been prepared by each local area. We had been preparing for two months before the video conference began. World-wide, we had tried to compile what the last six months had given us within the foundation work to forge documentation on global outlines. A set of values which we have agreed upon were these specifications:

Has the will to do good for oneself and one's fellow humans been the guideline for this particular

field's specification?

Is this a job description that I would let my most beloved and myself work within?

Is this an administration that I would let my most beloved and myself be delegated by?

Is this a valid change within this administration which will develop this field (industrial, educational, healthcare and so on)?

Is this outline in accordance with nourishing and developing improvement of sound routines in a workplace?

Is this an outline following a more wholesome and favorable course of action for humanity as a whole?

Is this an approach which will strengthen the individual member of staff to feel appreciated and valued in the workplace?

This work is key because our assessment is that most people want to keep supporting the old system. Humanity perceives that following our "leaders" is the only way to live safely and to have any possibility for prosperity. This despite the fact that, in truth, these modern world "kings and queens" give us neither. We buy into short-sighted hopes for happiness. Even if it's such an unrealistic oasis as the shimmer of hope at securing a future by winning the lottery or focusing one's energies of longing and hope on the more reliable nirvana of having some recreational intoxication at the end of the week. The modern "opium of the people".

Not to say that parties and recreation aren't important but that our priorities have become distorted, as has our definition of "leaders" who in reality most definitely are not functional leaders.

Our children's schools can be crumbling – the teams of teachers terribly understaffed and the schools' buildings a health hazard. And yet, the energy that ought to be spent by adults getting involved in these issues of huge importance are always used to blame someone or something else. I can see too many situations in which I have just let glaring issues slide in the past - and I still do, for that matter. Since we are all in the same boat, there is only so much one person can do on their own.

Other things have become clear: we become triggered with the overwhelming sense of

hopelessness at the sheer thought of overthrowing our integrated power structures, even though they are so clearly destructive. When imagining such impossible feats as “overthrowing and replacing”, we keep ourselves in the crumbling loop, deadened, and instead doing nothing.

The truth is that exactly every individual’s labor effort ought to be recognized as essential and extremely valuable to our race’s prosperity. One positive effort often causes a landslide of positive inspiration that makes something attractive for someone else to apply. Look at the cleaning up of plastic and recycling. The warmth in one’s heart at performing these efforts gives inner nourishment to the continued will to do it.

It’s about time we evolved into something more than just ravaging, consuming and thoughtless beings. We know that every person who gets a chance can develop and grow into a strong and useful person for the community and the families around them. Given the chance. The science is here! The human resources definitely are too.

The awareness needs to get on to a global scale. Every single one of us does make the difference.

People from the media have been terribly targeted. There have been five assassinations in the last two months. Anonymity and protective details have been assigned to journalists to keep these terrorists from killing again. It is strange to be calling old friends of the family terrorists but it is absolutely without a doubt the privileged few that are instigating these murders.

The last big media coverage has been focusing on the research on consumer impact. The slogan “Don’t boast about it – just savor changing your consumer habits!” has sunk in. Especially with the middle class where the huge impact of consumption reduction is being made. Another that also caught my attention is “Don’t argue it, don’t discuss it, don’t boast it – just do it!” These slogans really touch me and have strengthened me to become more responsible and to make the decision my very own. It’s not targeting or threatening me to take a stand or to overthrow or hate something or somebody, it only makes me think about what I can practicably do. It gives me pride to choose and a sense of taking a position of real importance.

The initial fear of the whole world collapsing and everyone starving because of the stock market

crumbling has been replaced by hope. The media has begun serving up solutions for households to stock up on foods that will last in the long-term. Also articles have been focusing on what governments and large companies can do to ease the beginnings of this re-ordering of matters from not working to working. Ehm, research material on globally realistic approaches might just be provided from some work groups I know. Just very possibly.

The car and oil impact coverage continues and I just can't believe how few cars are on the roads these days. Bicycles are everywhere. The angle of letting people know that to seeing ourselves and our loved ones through a 3-year period of serious commitment around personal consumer habits *will* make the change into a better world realistically doable. When taken down to a day-to-day action, individual responsible bettering, the evolution of the management of our world seems less impossible. And the media continuously publishes figures to prove the huge effects responsible action makes. It's incredible how much a change such small "sacrifices" in such a short span of time has made! Just think of reassessing the impact in 3 years! What a gift to give to oneself!

The willingness in people to make a change has come so quickly! It is magical! It's like a Disney story come true. People are standing up for their world's future. This brings tears of joy to my whole being. Tears of happiness and gratitude. Finally the "never mind, let somebody else do it"-attitude is sinking to its grave!

Well, that's all for today. Sometimes I actually fear for my life writing this. All the people throughout the last centuries who have been assassinated because of speaking out about forwarding something which promotes the empowerment of everyday Joes, Jos and Josies. Individuals horribly eliminated for making clear the startling beauty and the absolute need for us to evolve, to get ourselves out of this stagnant loop of destructiveness. We've been at this since the dawn of time – consuming one forest after the next for fire wood and just moving on instead of responsibly re-planting.

It has been a distinct pattern of those murdered visionaries to have been people who threaten the dis-rule of the mindless, short sighted and irresponsible "owners" and "leaders". The ravagers of

our rich, beyond-measure glorious, home. Our Earth. To bring about this change, to be moving into our fuller potential as individual human beings, means a massive threat to those disappearing few.

I have to write this diary or else I will burst, but I don't have to print it, do I?! ~

REINAR

He went through the plans for the thousandth time. He shuffled the papers away from himself and shut his eyes. As watertight as it could be. On paper. The human factor was something else entirely. Reports of Reactionists' successful actions had been sparse but enough to reassure him that for the most part, things were in place. Those who hadn't been able to make confirmations were especially positive – this meant that they had been apprehended in the wrong places, which was exactly what they had planned for. There had been a few messages that had told of aborted missions but they were only about 20%. These last two years the drop-outs had almost diminished, but he calculated that possibly 3 to 5% of his active Reactionists hadn't gone through with this mission. It was an outcome he expected for a mission with this degree of harmful intent. The others he relied on as performing successfully. They were securely captured and in the safe hands of the PDD. All according to plan. He did not like having his people locked up but this was his endgame. It was all or nothing now, and the probability of winning was aggravatingly mostly nothing.

He hated not having been able to buy anyone inside the facility where Angela and Ray were being held. The others who had been caught after these diverting attacks across his continent upset him too of course, but Angela and Ray were like the family he'd never got to have. He was very proud of them and now he was also very worried about them. He had believed that he could get them transferred through his influence and earlier bribes, but then he found out too late that he had been betrayed again. If he had known, he would never have had them involved in this part. They would

have been here, on the yacht, with him. He slammed the book he'd been reading into the bulkhead. His whole goddam life was going to hell. Excruciatingly slowly, but most evidently to hell. This goddam plan was a fly's fart in the wind. The two people who were left on this wretched globe of do-gooders, the only people that really meant anything to him, were locked up. As a result of that idiot peasant's betrayal he would probably never see them again.

Buying people off had, on a global scale, become more difficult, if not bloody impossible, with time. Only two years ago they'd had at least one person inside the 250 detention centers world-wide. People doing what they were told and rewarded handsomely for it. Now this figure had diminished to having a faithful Reactionist within possibly 40 or 50 centers.

The old faithful lot had turned tables and he took a deep, halting breath. His personal route back to power was most probably not going to happen. Rage burned inside him. The rewards he and his people were able to offer were immaterial because ownership wasn't currency any more. Time and quality of life were and what could he offer that could beat that? He was exiled on a bloody yacht for G's sake!

Land and homes were a human right and people were getting whatever they wanted since resources weren't an issue these days. What he had left to give those who stayed loyal to him had been promises of prominent positions after they had taken back the governing of humanity. But this new world filled with plush buddies had taken even that leverage from him. There were a few who were staying on. Lately he had begun to realize that they did so because they were almost as full of hatred and urging to dominate others as he was. He was atoned with that being who he had always been. From firmly believing in his mastery and right to delegate and dominate others to suit his purposes, while benevolently providing for the less fortunate as he deemed fit. Just as his ilk had done before him since forever. That was where this new world had taken him – on a ride from that and gushing on through floodgates, bends and ends up to here, having to swallow that this new system worked for people and that all he had ever fought for was proving useless, even dangerous, for people. He didn't care though. Even seeing this, because he saw it clearly. He wasn't stupid - he

just didn't care!

He wasn't like Angela who really believed that she had been deprived and that she was being mistreated. At least he hoped he wasn't. He was more of a vengeful, bitter type who couldn't bear these people, this whole shitty world, shaming and blaming him. He wanted his way of life back. He didn't care that it had been destructive. He had loved to shine and be adored, to be able to make people squirm at the whims of his schemes. Nothing else gave him the kicks he craved.

He closed his eyes and flashing images of successful bombings from the past and other defiant acts of obstruction filled his distraught mind. He would do as much damage as he ever could! He would! And, if he had to, he would go down unleashing it! They would pay. Even if none of the six heads of families left would ever come into power again, the world would pay while they were going down. What the other five were doing he didn't even know any more. It had been two years since they had been able to meet in person and almost one since they had dared to communicate. A few messages had been delivered but not recently. He had no clear idea of how the other parts of the Restoration's procedures were going. What he knew was what media reported and those articles contents were under restrictions so as not to encourage or reveal too much to those on his side of the fence. He could only dream, hate and hope.

How many Reactionists he'd lost was also impossible to estimate. There was no way of knowing how many would still act when the day came. The operatives who had planted the recent devices had been 53 in number. From his 300 a year ago to have been reduced to 53 was too disgusting to even contemplate.

He cursed the day of the invention of the internet. Or at least of it having been released so thoughtlessly to the common man. The downfall had begun when people had been allowed to share information freely.

Infuriated, he realized that he was acting out like any cornered animal would do. He hated to see that the Bettering, he actually spat the word out, was actually succeeding in the destruction of the order of things. People could work 15 to 20 average hours per week and still have beautiful homes,

well-educated children with promising and prosperous futures ahead of them. This blooming world order was bringing every little Joe to join in. A society with no need for someone with his ambitions or any of his kind hovering over the middle and lower classes anymore. How the hell had so many of his own employees gotten into these damned planning committees before he'd had any raised warning flags in time?! It was a waking nightmare that he couldn't afford to go mad over. He had literally feared for his sanity on several occasions when that question came up.

Instead he rose and stretched his legs, walking up to the railings to stare out onto the flat line of the moonlit sea which met the dark, star-sprinkled sky in the horizon. He managed to slow his pulse and then dove into the ocean. The water had always had a cooling effect on his temper. He lay on his back, floating silently, looking up at the stars.

He would go out with a bang, as they say. No less! A course of action that he hoped would boldly underline the depletion of the old ways and he would be abhorred in disgraceful descriptions in current media and future history books. He would leave a solid statement, a huge mark on this world and a fierce tear in the families that had destroyed his own and his peers' glorious legacies. They would know him and his kind and they would be fucking paying.

He climbed up the ladder onto the yacht's deck, dried off and went back mid-ship into the salon. Resting his eyes on the pictures of the mansions and estates on the wall. The homes and lands that were being transformed into any nobody's property in accordance with the particular vacation rights and regulations that apparently were being reviewed. Disgust welled up in him and made his whole body feel sick. Random fucking anybody could book a vacation spot in the rooms of his childhood nursery! Any-fucking-nobody could scuba-dive in *his* glorious coves!

Had he surrendered to this megalomania he would have been able to stay on his properties for the rest of his life. At rooms of his choosing. All the calm he'd mustered turned to cinder, his pulse hammered frighteningly again "stay-fucking-on"?! The estates were his!

No, he had to stop thinking about the should-have-beens. The skin of his face was feeling stretched, thumping. He would not die of a heart attack before the harm had been done.

They would know the purity of his hate. They would feel the depths of his hatred, of his undying wrath.

If anyone had seen him they would have seen the seething pleasure in the gleaming slits of his eyes.

RAY

He'd gotten the feel of the luxury of his family's old main home over this past weekend. The drugs had been really helpful for enhancing the experience. A dreamy smile spread across his face. The upcoming bright future had felt more realistic than ever before. They had been able to furnish the master bedroom and the main living room with old furniture stocked in the basement and in the evenings Angela had shown him photographs and films from her childhood on the big screen in one of the conference rooms. Of course the art and curtains had been partly changed but Grandma had said that all the wallpapers were as she remembered them. She had sounded so cheerful and always became lively when she described those times to him.

"We would of course have had the tapestries altered into the latest designs, as we always used to do every other year or so, but it is still heart-warming to see the quality and beauty of what we invested into our home. It is important to indulge one's senses. Managing the jobs we provided for all our employees across the globe took its toll on your great-grandfather, you see. To have the private grounds and this spacious and aesthetically grand home, made his and our, his family's, burdens easier to bear." She smiled and the way her face shone at these memories filled him with joy and envy. He wanted to have that. To have his birthright back!

He worried for her these days. She was getting forgetful and often repeated herself. But he loved the pictures she painted for him of the strife and grandeur of his ancestral heritage. The descriptions

of all the good and charity the companies they had owned had provided for so many people. He'd also learned to share her fears for humanity's future. For the obscenity and naivety of messing with the natural order of things. Most people are creatures in need of strong leadership. That's the way it has always been. Left to fantasies of equity, equality and the absurd belief that anyone could handle limitless resources, the human race would be doomed. Irresponsibility, lack of purpose and the inherent lazy character flaw of ordinary folk would lead to it all eventually falling into chaos.

He had attended so many of their secret meetings. It had started already in his earliest teens. He was sad that such a small number of young people attended. They would need young blood to strengthen their struggle. Most of the youngest in the active resistance were in their upper 40s and most active leaders were 80 and older. He had only met a handful of people his own age. He wasn't really able to recruit more people either. They had bought into the dangerous lies fed to them by the current administrations. So few looking ahead and learning from history about how steadfast powers had been integrated in the past.

This morning Emica, his closest and by two years elder sister, had come to visit him. He didn't understand how his two siblings could be so different from him. They had all spent lots of time with Angela and she had told them all the same stories from the old days. But Laur and Emica believed everything that they were being indoctrinated into. They had no minds of their own. This morning Emica and he had ended up shouting at each other, as usual:

"This world will never survive," he argued. "It will not be challenging enough for people. Laziness won't motivate anyone to bring forth their best work! People need hardship to exceed or they will stop pushing themselves to keep their society on its feet. How do you think we came this far? By everyone being sugar-coated into doing whatever they please?!" He had heard her arguments so many times and loved it when they set fire to his heart.

Emica, she just looked away from him and got that sad and resigned but resilient look in her eyes:

"We will not go back to those medieval ways. The only reason we survived as a race is because humans have always helped others in times of crisis. In the early days when leaders were especially

equipped to actually contribute something of value to the welfare of the group, then people allowed them to lead because they were good at it!”

“So you are saying that our family that provided for millions of people in the 1900s were weak leaders? How can you just not see the lie of that? You’re brainwashed, sis! We planned and executed so many global enterprises and let people provide for their families all across the world!”

“What the world needed back then would have been strategists, able to guide and strengthen the people and take care of the planet. That’s what we’re doing today! Leading, actual leading! On to better everyday life and actually protecting ourselves from harmful threats. Not like the leaders that you and Angela want to reinstate – predators masquerading as capable but in fact weakening their own people and consciously poisoning the waters, food and lands! That was so sick! Can’t you see that?!”

“That’s such a lie, Emica! Our forefathers were always looking ahead and deserved the life of abundance that they earned from their sacrifices as leaders! When your so-called “Bettering” began, those who simply handed over their companies and lands without defending them were what you call weak! Our family wanted to continue to keep people safe. You can ask Angela!”

“Bah! They only ever looked for short-term profit! Come on, Ray! The ultimate leaders of our species’ earliest beginnings were well taken care of by the people because they were actually doing a good job. People in the villages wanted them well-guarded, well-fed and having partners that would hopefully forward those genes. But look, really look at our family’s history! When did we ever do anything for anyone else’s long-term benefit? Truly, Ray?! A bloody lot of bling-bling and ka-ching, but that was it. Talk about manipulation. Shiny outfits, posture, batting eyelashes and not to mention debate training. How to flash words like candy to blindside people to the nothingness and depletion that was happening in the real world! Relentlessly crushing resistance under their rich and powerful heel, never giving the improvement of working conditions a second thought because “the way it had always been” kept making them richer.”

He shook his head at her in silence. These lies. These made up “theories”. How could they be so

blind? People were a bunch of sheep if they weren't fighters or conquerors. He knew that Emica wouldn't budge but he still had to try. His tone was deep and his speech was slow:

"If you are weak you will be taken over by someone who is stronger, Emica! Please get on the right side of things, if not for your own sake, so for the sake of the future. Before it's too late! You have so much of your ancestry in you. Why are you throwing everything away to build something that will be crumbling soon? Put your intellect and energy into setting things straight again. Humanity is not made for "everyone having a chance". It never was and never will be!"

Emica had looked him straight in the eye. "The usefulness of that kind of leadership died when it started enjoying the fruits without having planted them. Someone started manipulating and feigning leadership qualities just to get at the luxuries that came with the position. Entourages and armies being fed benefits and power without actually doing any good for people anymore. We will not go back to that, brother. Never again."

He saw tears in his sister's eyes and was taken aback when she flung herself around his neck and kissed him fiercely on the cheek. She held him tight and said:

"I'll be back to see you soon! I'll bring your favorite chocolate. I love you!"

She looked to the floor, swept him a quick glance as she knocked to be let out. It was as if she didn't dare to stay or even linger because she almost flew out the door as soon as it opened. He got a sense that maybe she didn't even have the need to argue with him anymore, which really made him angry – how dare she belittle him like that?!

His words had just choked him and he hadn't managed to get together a stinging come-back before the door had locked behind her. Caging him in here. He tried to block out the fleeting image in his mind of her wandering out into the world, being able to go to a café, to a concert or just home to her beautiful house. The thought of having a home sent a bolt of anguish through his stomach and he had to quickly and harshly remind himself of why he was here. Why he fought this fight. Why he wouldn't succumb to this madness. To this world of fools!

He attacked the floor by alternately doing push-ups and jogging on the spot for an hour. Possibly

endangering his health because he was so early in the withdrawal and physical rehabilitation from the drugs. He continued anyway - anything was better than the feeling of missing out. He focused on the blood pumping fiercely through his veins. He would flush out the chemicals still lingering and repair the harm of the alcohol's dissolving effects.

A small voice inside tried to cut through his resolve, lamely suggesting for him to take it easy, to take better care of himself, that this frantic workout would do more harm than good. But he needed to erase picturing the lives that his friends and siblings were living. He had to shut it out as hard as he could. He couldn't soften and bend to their rushing to tumble over the cliff's edge. The era of human reign was near its end. How could they not see the logic of this?

He forced his thoughts back to the events of the past weekend's preparing for the coming distraction maneuvers. In his mind he brought up the conversations he'd had with his grandmother, their meaning and the encouraging words enhanced in the rhythm of his blood pounding loudly through his mind.

Someday they would have to understand. Or, maybe he would be the only one of them able to enjoy the new times that lay ahead. It pained him to think like that but he had to train himself into accepting it if that was to be the future. It seemed they were all too far gone. They probably wouldn't be there to have the chance to regain their family's former glory. The best strategy would be to have patience and make new decisions in the aftermath of the events of the next few weeks.

RAISIE

Unpacking. Tears burning the insides of her eyelids. This secrecy! And Arun thinking that she was going away for a retreat. This was the last time. It truly ate away at her to have to lie to him in this outright fashion. After this trip she would finally be able to bring him on board. She hoped.

She absentmindedly folded her bikini and bathing suit into the closet. They weren't all lies, of course because, yes, she would be doing a lot of diving and these first three days she would be here in this recluse cabin. It would be fine. He would understand. She had to believe that. For now. Well, there was nothing she could do about it now, anyway.

Her emotions flared at the certainty of Angela and Ray having had significant roles in the dangerous and murderous schemes which PDDs from all over the world were here to evaluate and investigate. Within five days from now, when their teams were done mapping the clues and movements of the suspects, would be when she and her colleagues would step in. Also they would then need to determine in which ways they would have to resort to conducting the interrogations of the detainees held in custody world-wide. She had been asked if she wanted to be kept out of that part of the meeting because of her family's involvement and she hadn't answered them yet. She knew that these interrogations were going to be on a much rougher scale than they ever had had to resort to before. She couldn't think about it and of course she couldn't think about anything else. She longed to be cliff-climbing because then her mind would have to be focused on that and only that.

The threat of violent deaths on this large scale had never been exposed in advance before. The information had come in only just after she had seen her mother and Ray yesterday morning. Things were happening too fast. She took meditative breaths, closing her eyes for a minute, realizing that she needed to retake the now immediately or she might fall into a writhing heap on the ground. This might be where she had to draw a line for herself. The personal attachment was possibly too close to heart.

Enough. She brought out the greens and beans from the fridge and mixed a colorful bowl of brunch. She spread butter on a crispy roll and prepared a sparkling non-alcoholic drink, piled it all on a tray and carried that out onto the veranda. She unpacked the solar charger and brought it with her onto the porch, inserted the charger to her portable and hooked up. Time to book the swimming pool for later. There was a magnificent pool at a villa a couple of kilometers from here where she

could swim privately for an hour or two depending on availability.

Practical matters and physical activities were her kind of mind-wipe. She had to determinedly think of other things right now, otherwise the agony of the real world threatened to obliterate the wonder of being alive. Learning the methods to discern one thing from another within her emotional life had begun in pre-school and usually came with much more ease. But this being a family matter was a very real tragedy and not some everyday situation that she could work through by determining if there was action to be taken or if she might be overreacting. This was a deep core pain with so many factors involving her reactions and decisions since Ray had been little. Things that she was unable to fix. She knew that she was definitely not overreacting. This was horrible. She felt that she would come no further though, so she had to redirect her energy into the now. She murmured to herself:

“Ray, we will see this through. It will be as you decide. You are grown-up now. I cannot do anything but love you. Always love you. I’m so sorry.”

She helped herself regain the present by letting her sorrow and fear take the backseat, engaged her senses by focusing on lifting the bread to her mouth, taking a bite, chewing, swallowing, having a fork of salad and letting the tastes help her feel gratitude and delight for this small thing and for the place where she sat. This cabin had been a favorite of hers for many years. It was built quite a way up of the face of Teide. She often chose this area for recuperating. She was blissfully alone here and, other than the breath-taking view and surroundings, there was mostly only her own mind and body to distract her. Soon her feet would be doing meditative trekking for a couple of hours to the face of the cliff that she was going to climb.

In a few days, when she moved down to the seaside resort, there would surely be time for diving and lazy slouching in the sun. But that would be between the upcoming endless hours of assessing the threats they’d been alerted about. Hours of studying their suspects’ routes of movement with as much information as their methods of surveillance had managed to gather. Hours of conferring about actions to take. She dreaded it but not nearly as much as her heart burned and yearned for it.

The incentive was stronger. Otherwise she wouldn't be here. But for now she was just alone and she sorely needed to be.

She felt herself grounding when she noticed that she could spontaneously feel how much she loved the tall, invincible Canary Island pines, their whisperings, hinting of shared love and beauty in stored tales of indigenous people and Spanish immigrants, and the creaking of their branches complaining about the many dark secrets of horrific tribal conflicts and, later, of the savage violence of mindless conquerors. The centuries past stored in the crowns of green, in the longest pine needles pointing into the air surrounding the face of Teide.

A clear sky allowed her the magnificent view of the sparkling endless Atlantic and the volcanic rugged coastline far beneath dotted with the island's paradisiacal beaches.

She smiled in spite of herself. This was where she hoped to come to stay for a few months in the winters when the decades had gotten the best of her limbs and they demanded warmth and sea. Perhaps well into her 130s or 140s. Sitting here, getting the help she needed from municipal caretakers if needed. She envisioned Arun in the next chair and hopefully enjoying visits by family and friends. Just sitting, slowly rocking in one of those cushy recliners, listening with her heart to the view, to the thickest whispers of time. Looking back at her achievements, admiring the wonders put into motion by the people of this flourishing Earth and of what she herself had brought to this evolutionary process. Basking in all things that were the makings of a difference, of satisfaction and pride at living in this blossoming home of Homo sapiens. This new world where everyone was of importance, where everyone who chose to could feel realistic optimism for the future in their hearts.

This beautiful planet of wonders twirling about the Sun.

LUCIA

} Angela just called. She is staying in her father's wing for the most part now. She does stay here with me now and again but taking care of little Mickey as a reliable sharing half-time parent is all I can manage for the time being. And I do try to have him more than that since my Angela situation is out of control. I know that their father told her to call me because she really didn't have much to say. I ended up offering her money for shopping. I just hate myself for the incapacity that I have with her! I realize that I didn't get the right tools in the toolbox from my parents because they didn't get them from their parents and so on and so on, but that doesn't take away the shame and pain.

With everything else going on with her I can't cope being here for both kids. It's awful to face up to it and the children are so lucky to have him for a dad - he simply is the best. Angela's been stirring up trouble at school and I have to trust the therapist and Magni to be her main grown-up support. Mickey is very easy and I have the work to think about. I'm beyond grateful to Magni for how supportive he is. Since I told him about what I'm working on and how far we've come he's been on board 100%. I'm very fortunate. The question is how fortunate Angela is. The terrible saying "collateral damage" comes to mind. Ugh! I have to live with myself. I can't write about her any more right now. It's awful. I'm awful!

But there is no leaving the committee at this point and doing that has never really been an option ever since I got involved. I bring Mickey wherever I go and when we're at home I'm completely spent. I'll be taking a week off soon and the four of us are going to Iceland. Hot springs, hikes and maybe diving in Silfra – the clearest waters in the world, they say. Angela just got her scuba-divers license. To think she's 12 already. Well, I can't even be properly happy about that because I'm feeling so wretched about our relationship. Non-relationship. Back there again. Of course. I think about her so much – not that helps her in any way, but there's just no leaving the job unfinished! We're making such huge progress. There is no other way! This is not what future working conditions are being planned to look like. People will not have to work themselves into alienation from their loved ones, friends and fun and, as it is today, even from oneself. Grrr-dammit!

I've tried to restructure my workload and I hang on to Mickey for dear life. I have to. I've done a lot these last three years through being present at online meetings, some of which have been set up by our workgroup solely for my benefit, but sometimes it isn't enough. A few times we've held inconspicuous deliberations here. I am not at all comfortable with that for obvious security reasons, but sometimes there has been no other way.

At another crucial fork we had two heads leading several huge companies wanting to meet with me, and only me, for deliberations about how to proceed. They wouldn't take no for an answer. We had most meetings over secure servers but a couple of times we met in person. It was like a spy novel. I went out for a walk in a forest and they had come from the other direction and we met up, having the meeting sitting under trees in the thickest part of the woods. Crazy but definitely necessary. Assassinations are happening. There can't be lapses in security.

Anyway, they showed me incredible solutions to administrative queries that we've been trying to get around this past year. Now these rather new teams just cracked it and came up with procedures that will better all levels within production and distribution. These were only rough drafts, but with their and their staff's expertise there is no doubt that these routines will make for industrial production rocketing to new levels of serving humanity with whatever it needs and more. Especially since the goal is to update and revise effectivity and productivity constantly. It's amazing when human intelligence is finally being put to the use of enriching our species as a whole! To deliberate the exponential rate of practical improvement is exhilarating. It must be the result of us finally reasoning with a base of inclusion, there can be no other explanation for the genius that is being unleashed here. What a ride!

We are truly getting cornerstones into place because of the enormous strides we've made with escalating numbers joining in from major companies, prominent scientists, municipal administrators and politicians. All beginning to choose this path of progressive development. We are overjoyed, of course, and at the same time it's now that things are getting critical and very dangerous. The progress we are making is at a very much touch-and-go junction right now. Everyone involved is in

fear for their lives. Security is difficult when the numbers of people involved have increased so quickly and are steadily increasing at avalanche speeds, but we have the best of the best working security and everyone is scrutinized and carefully involved in discussions to get a feel for their reactions. It takes a long time before being allowed to join essentially every work group. We are working for a near future when administrations will be running the way that we are outlining and are practicing with baby steps here. To imagine that my grandchildren might grow up in a world where this is the norm!

These procedures have been in motion since the very first days, being worked out by extremely competent personnel from different security branches from all over the world. Their routines are also constantly monitored and revised by a global hush-hush workgroup. There is a need for extreme caution. “Luckily”, many of the individuals within these professional security groups have been trained exceptionally well due to the decades of extremist terrorism that has plagued the world for some time now. We are fortunate to have so many humanists among them.

Globally there are at least 20 million people involved on these secretive structural planning levels. Our exact numbers are impossible to calculate since we can't keep records. Lives are at stake every day and yet we are “only” looking at six people being murdered world-wide last month. Four journalists, two outspoken political opposers of the corporate powers paying people's wages in brand-labelled coupons and one strike leader. This is why we strongly advise against demonstrations in these desperate times. It is better to go with the individual resilient - but silent - resistance.

Crime rates are also plummeting world-wide and there is not yet any clear conclusion as to why this is happening. We would have thought this betterment in social development was too early to see but desperate people are already changing their ruthless attempts at fixing their lives. Somehow things are moving toward the better. Our experts are sure that it isn't just a phase because it's been a clear trend for the past two years now.

Some of the behavioral scientists in our group are speculating that it could be an outcome of the

relentless highlighting by the media of the importance of individual responsibility for respecting worthy boundaries within every area of one's life. Nurturing these abilities might be influencing both perpetrators toward more empathetic behaviors.

Also victims, their families and friends, with the growing support and backup of the media and other municipal agencies, are more firmly setting boundaries for themselves by contacting protective aid and having the confidence and possibility to remove themselves from dangerous situations. Some statistics prove this to be what is happening, but we don't know for sure yet. They are continuously looking into it. For now it's just something to be celebrated!

This whole process of personal responsibility has escalated so quickly that we haven't had time to follow up on many areas but crime decreasing has become very apparent. Media is boosting and encouraging this development so we're just extremely happy.

The only crime rates that have escalated have done so in the extremes though and that is tax-evasion and that many people, much more than usual, are not getting their salaries paid out. We are putting a lot of effort into seeing that healthcare, food and water are being provided. Here it has been crucial to have big companies involved that are on the path of bettering and moving away from exclusionary practices. This will definitely be the most important area where resources have to be continuously mobilised, ready and practicably organised for distribution as quickly as possible to populations across the globe. Those who want to remain in power according to the old ways are beginning to realize that something is happening. The world of banking is getting freezing feet. Trying to get a grip because they are noticing their foundation is wobbling. We have quite a few bankers within our planning committees and they are working frantically to draw up solutions to ease the doubts and anger that will undoubtedly rise in people with trust funds, investments, stocks and properties. The ground rule for these outlines is that no one will be deprived of anything – the amounts of monetary sums and properties will not be withheld or become worthless. The conversion must be that these people get even a little more than the resources they had before. This will not apply for extreme billionaires and such but they will still have more, if they want to, than

most people could spend in 5 lifetimes. That is a process I don't get involved in but these experts tell us that this conversion is quite simple.

“With my brilliant mind for these things there will be more than plenty for everyone in the end.”

The exact words of our bankers spokesperson at a lecture he held a couple of months ago. My mind can't ever wrap itself around the progress he described that they were reaching, and I was too tired to listen to most of it, but I have confidence in all the other people there who were nodding in deep agreement, hanging on his every word, so that's all I need to know.

When the day comes to begin an informative campaign on these matters, with the media doing its best, the integration processes of earnings and ownership will be simpler than my mind wants to make – it wants to complicate the whole issue into winding and blinding knots of spiraling roads. Not easy, but with the base they have been creating they're saying it will be a simple procedure to implement into society. Again, thanks to the internet!

We are hoping that the tipping point is near, five to ten years at the most, so it's important to have as much resources ready to move on the ground as possible. The positive ripples that are showing already cause the escalation of backward-strivers to hoard even worse than ever and they are kicking hard. Thankfully they don't really have that many visible targets to kick at. Many of those involved are on levels that don't reveal any actions that can be potentially dangerous for them or others. Who can be threatened or sacked for just doing their job and doing it a little better and in just a mini-different way than before? We should call this “The Sneaky Evolution”! Hehe!

This truly is a non-violent development – otherwise, if we resort to thwarting and judging and excluding we would still be on the old path, right?!

The base we've worked at constructing these past few years is a solid starting point. Many of the people who have chosen to work within the processes of outlining guidelines are quietly trickling them into the real world of workplaces and health-, plus recreational institutions.

Not to mention what we envision to integrate into schools and other resources for children and young people. I heard an old friend of my mother's when he was giving an inspirational talk to a

worn-out bunch of educationalists a few weeks back. They had presented the material they had been working on for the last two years and needed a few days of pampering so we had them stay at a 5-star resort and I booked the kids and me at the same time. I needed the encouragement too and I know him to be a great speaker. I'm glad I recorded it. I'll just write down a favorite passage:

“I wish I could have gotten an educational plan like this as a kid. It becomes so self-evident now that this kind of schooling will bring huge benefits to our children and therefore to our future. To learn about being a person alongside the usual subjects and to be able to work at your own pace with consideration given to your needs. An important example of this is that puberty and the significant strain it puts on the teenager's mind and body is finally taken into consideration, as well as other physical or mental conditions that might affect the person profoundly while they are being educated. A learning environment where other considerations are included and the important thing is to learn - not only to achieve. Now that education is free, reaches everywhere and is available on such high and individually paced levels, the world is igniting with radiant breakthroughs beyond anything we had ever dreamed of – none of the first planning committees had had even the faintest idea and not even the most optimistic enthusiasts had predicted such outcomes at the level of material and behavioral scientific advancements. To think of the resources these kids will become as adults in the workplace. Balanced individuals with sound personal integrity.” He laughed. “I had to go to therapy to get even the basic feels for anything remotely similar to what this plan suggests for them. And in addition my family still had to hire private tutors for me to get my degrees. Think about bright children who come from families with no money and of all the brilliant innovations and inventions that never see the light of day because of monetary obstacles! In fields of behavioral and tutorial sciences, physics and chemical sciences – the list of areas that are being stunted is endless. I sometimes think about Stephen Hawking and the horror of the world having been deprived of his genius if his family hadn't been rich!”

He made pause for effect letting his gaze take in the nodding crowd, and then continued.

“How many children, young people and even adults for that matter, are out there and have never

been heard, never been seen or even thought to be needed? Too many that have never been able to contribute to their world, our world, because of such petty blocking stones as monetary issues! To think that we live on the only abundant planet that we have been able to discover and that we are letting it go to utterly wasteful ends. It's perverse!" There were actual tears in his eyes. "My dear co-workers, when I think of that, then the whole workload we are putting in here, every hour, and also the precious minutes that we neglect to spend in our current private lives – all of it becomes worth it. Every single second. The future is our birthright. The coming generations' birthright! To be given this as a small child, the time to get to know what one needs and wants, how one thinks and reacts. To be able to use that knowledge in this world holding such marvelous resources! Imagine everything we have yet to discover and develop here, in our own world! This work we are doing, it will save the Earth and Homo sapiens. It will make the world a place for humanity to exceed itself! Thank you for all your efforts!" The applause would never end.

He was flocked after this. He raised his head above the group of listeners and winked at me, all the while sharing smiles with the educationalists crowding him with their enthusiasm. I had to laugh out loud. Sometimes what we are achieving here seems like the joke with the perfect twist – I could never have wrapped my head around this kind of global progress ten years ago. It is sinking into my understanding that we are actually doing this and sometimes, like now it just hits home with a heavier punch. These enormous numbers of people pulling together. Citizens being more responsible for their consumer habits than anyone could have dreamt. And now that we are getting somewhere with key government officials and conglomerates there is really no going back. I just can't believe it sometimes. Now that humanity can share global awareness of what joy, fulfillment and responsibility actually require from individual to administrative levels – there is no turning back! To give every little child a sturdy and balanced emotional and intellectual platform to mature along will change the world. Our responsibility is to build the foundations now. In this first half of the 2000s. We can just be humble and do the work that is needed from us. There is no letting the coming generations down. There is only for us to go to bed in the evening knowing that we have

done all we could this day. And the pure satisfaction of that is more productive than I have felt in all of my previous projects. Ever!

Earlier evolutionary strides, such as the agricultural and industrial, grew from ideas and led on to them being harvested for profit by the few enslaving and plundering, and they would not share. Gains reached by achieving goals for the shortsighted safety of a very few individuals, their goals ensuring only themselves as much economic and physical convenience as possible. It didn't matter how hard the masses worked, tried and even strived. "Success" measured solely on hoarded substantial profits, mostly gained through luck, inheritance or by material and monetary manipulation along with other people's long hours of work.

The agricultural and industrial leaps served superb purposes for the human race in the past. No doubt about it. But the fruits of those supposed evolutionary strides were kept from most citizens. The better life they were supposed to bring was not really integrated into the daily lives of the middle and lower classes. Even if monetary wages were raised, people found themselves in positions at a workplace which was understaffed and with inhumane workloads. This is true today. These conditions range from politicians to executives, cashiers to social workers, from nurses to surgeons. Wages are not enough to give a person a quality life. Globally most people aren't getting even enough wages to support themselves and their families or to be able to give their children proper schooling. We have been told that people only have to work harder to get ahead and if they are poor it's mainly because they are lazy – but over all, most hardworking people are paid a pittance! And on top of that they are never completely ensured that there will always be a need for their services.

With better educational systems along with the wonder of machines and the internet, this new evolutionary step is ripe for realizing. Any person can reach marvellous levels of being a resource in the world within their own potential.

To restructure the thinking from admiration for the pursuit of goals solely focused on thoughtless and impulsive gain, to admiration for and aspirations to better lives for one and all.

We've had a week of inspiring quotes being fed to us. It is evidently transparent that we who are working with these issues, with many having double workloads, are in huge need of mind candy. This one really made everyone in the room smile today. I copied it word for word from a news site and it's apparently going viral out there.

"I do have the greatest power in my hand and that is my credit card. I just did my grocery shopping. I parked the car and bought a bike. I will the save the world by doing something with this card. I will use it by putting it on a shelf, by not needing it for more than food for a few years now. They tell me that I have to save the world by giving my little pennies to the poor and the ravaged. But instead I say I will stop using my little pennies to feed those who are bleeding the ground and causing the unspeakable torments of famine and inequality instead. My little pennies will never save but a grain of those countless dunes of humans in harm's way. So, in any way I can, I will unpave the road we are on because with every step on it I am also being complicit. Let's all think ten times before we shop and drive next time. Let's think about our young and their lack of hope."

What a week. I'm truly spent. Gotta get some shut-eye now.

I'll catch up writing and sorting out the basics of the past few days tomorrow, but for now it's Nighty-Night! ~

REINAR

The yacht was surely anchored in the marina by now, under his First Mate's name. She was Reinar's right-hand person and also fronted as the manager of the crew on the would-be entertainment vessel. He had told her to dock and bring the pre-ordered provisions onboard, then they would just wait two more days before sailing again. He had made it clear that only extreme circumstances would bring him back onboard, but still, when they had reached open waters she

should scan for his beacon, just in case. If there was no signal then, that would mean that she could leave without ever looking back for him.

As always, she had received the order with her undivided attention and without question. He had surprised himself at feeling a jab of disappointment when she didn't show any emotion when he told her that this was probably their final good-bye. He knew that she knew that he was preparing for leaving for good and that she would be out of a 'job' after having been in his service for the past 36 years. She had always been flawlessly professional about their relationship, so if anyone was acting out of character here, it was him. He shook his head with a sad smile. What had he expected? That she would suddenly turn soft and needy? If anything, his reaction told him that *he* was the one who had some tender side to him and apparently he had the unrecognized need for something more than just being 'the boss' of the people surrounding him. He made a grimace – it was far too late for that kind of sentiment now wasn't it?! He shook it off. The moments of forging sincere relationships with other people were long past him. This was truly was a strange time. So many unexpected things surfacing and so many much more pressing deeds to enact. He would miss her though. And she would not miss him. 'Well then,' he thought, 'to the mission at hand.'

He had gotten into scuba gear last night about 140 meters off shore and surfaced along a deserted shoreline. He hid his equipment deep inside a narrow cavity where he believed it would be safe if he was going to need it again. He wasn't all that sure he would ever get off this blotch of lava. He had been successful at avoiding capture by the global forces of the PDD for decades. If he were found that would be it for him. Detention centers wouldn't be an option until long after extensive interrogations and at his age he would probably not survive the excitement in combination with probably all kinds of truth serums, he chuckled sarcastically to himself. No, this would probably be the last resort for him.

He inhaled deep breaths of the fresh ocean air and began his walk upwards along the trail he'd used so many times in his youth. He had many kilometers to cover and made good progress thanks to a cloudless sky and good leading light from a full moon. His thoughts wandered and he

wondered, as many times before, what the air and sea would have been like if the citizens of Earth hadn't changed their ways. That is to say if he and his ilk had gotten away with continuing their way of ruling the world. He knew that he wouldn't have changed a thing back then because he had been very happy with his life-style. He had even created a self-sufficient community on an island, a paradise on Earth, where he would have led a luxurious life until his last day.

Of course, he wouldn't have lived this long if science within the healthcare sector hadn't been reformed into getting limitless sources which it did firstly after the monetary system had been rendered obsolete. The number of health-related issues that had been resolved in a very short timespan after access to schooling and resources had become unconditional had to fill anyone, even him, with awe. Even the aging process had been slowed down which he wished he could have been less bitter to be able to enjoy. He hated it when he had to admire the results of this new world order.

At dawn he had made it halfway. He stopped to rest, sat down on a rocky edge and took in the glittering of dawn twinkling on the surface of the sea far below. It spoke to him of times when a man had a right to own what he took. He imagined the Spaniards arriving here, their impressive ships several abreast, sails bulging and unleashing foot soldiers to conquer and die, fighting for this land. The new leaders shaping and molding these Canary Islands and the indigenous population with unforgiving relentlessness. Discarding the individuals who wouldn't conform offhandedly and without mercy. Transforming the islands into what they, the Conquistadors, firmly held to be true and not being swayed from that conviction at any cost. A bold conquest in accordance with their ruler's requirements.

He admired that. Without that drive, humanity would have perished eons ago. But now he was seeing a world in another type of change. Conquest, or rather management, through administration, equity and cooperation. He loathed it but he could admit that they were being unexpectedly successful. Nothing he had been taught since his earliest childhood memories would have suggested that anything like this was within the human range of intelligence.

That the world was reaching incredible heights of industrialization and innovation and at the same

every single person had the power to orchestrate their own life quality within these developing humanitarian boundaries. There hadn't been the tiniest suggestion that ordinary people would have this amount of intelligence and determination to be responsible for their own lives. And that it all would function this smoothly was both irritating and infuriating. He hadn't owned a single company that had excelled in production in the ways every industry was doing these days!

"The plain commoners", to use his father's favorite words to describe middle and lower class workers, were plainly not that plain at all but most capable of taking humanity to new, unfathomed goals. He would never, ever admit that fact to any of his equals or followers. Not in a billion years. But here alone, just as he had discovered that he could at sea, he found himself encompassed by these silent truths. It was what had made him a great leader – his capacity to discover and pinpoint which strategies and workers on his executive boards would give him the most profits. He shuddered – today they were only talking about outcomes and the word "income" was the term that brought disgust and shudders to the people of this day.

Surrounded only by the Atlantic and alone with the sole company of the sighing Canary breeze, he dared think about the genius of this change. Even though it made him nauseous, he could still give the accomplishment his admiration and see it for the magnificent achievement that it really was. He didn't have to like it to do that. It still did unquestionably have his undivided hatred. The disgust he felt for this unprecedented integration of capitalism, communism and socialism was beyond words.

His undisguised inner world was an erratic mixture of insights these days. He had to do everything he could not to lose his mind.

When he connected the dots and bowed his stiff neck to this new, warped Conquistodorian reshaping of people's living conditions he recognized the benefits. Admitting to others that he could see the changes for the evolutionary stepping stones they were was something he was too stubborn to do. He couldn't and wouldn't ever do that to anyone but one person and thankfully he was going to meet her soon. Otherwise he feared he would explode. It hit him that maybe that was the true

reason for him coming here. To let off this steam.

He knew that he liked controlling and amassing material assets and people that would bring him personal gain. He took great pride in that personality trait and he had been envied and admired for it during the first decades of his professional lifespan. Thoroughly, he hated that he would never get to achieve the goals which his family and he had envisioned. Everything that he had conditioned his mind and focus into believing was going to be his life's work. His personal conquests which he would get to boast about achieving. These had been truths fashioned for him since his earliest memories and, truthfully, these were values claimed for him even before he had been born. He still yearned for that glory and power and throughout his life had had only that to reach for. Beyond words, he craved it! Like any creature that had been conditioned in a certain way, he presumed.

Somehow, despite the understanding of that battle being lost, he would still have glory. Be it a black, oozing statement – he would be known, he would be spoken of and he would bask in it. He would boast in it! He had to hope that time would give him at least that.

This was his mission on Tenerife. The result he wanted for the actions that had been planned to be executed during the upcoming weeks. He would have his say. He would make his point. And if this shitty, bloody-succeeding Utopia ever did fall flat on its sweet, snotty face his legacy might inspire others to conquer and rule in the future.

It was actually a sort of relief to contemplate his most probable defeat. It was a long time ago since he had been completely alone in a remote location like this and being able to get to a point when thinking undisturbed, in straight lines, about this matter. It was good to finally be here. He noticed that it had been too long ago since he had been on his own. Alone for a few more hours before she would come back to the cottage.

It would be a good talk. He looked forward to discussing with such an intelligent person. Continuing to be frank with himself he admitted that it was her he was looking forward to seeing again. The people that surrounded him these days were sorrily brainwashed by his agenda and agreeing with him was the only form of communicating that they knew. Thinking of it he sadly saw

that there wasn't anyone in his "band" of Reactionists who was the least bit challenging or inspirational to talk to. It was worse than sitting at the head of boardroom tables in the old days. Then there had always been the odd surprise or two every month or so of someone daring to oppose him. He rose to get going on the final stretch.

Another thing came to mind about this whole "Bettering" hellishness. The treacherous abandonment by those very people. Most of whom he had allowed so much power. Extensive advantages and trust had been handed their way over many, many years. It was beyond treason. He hoped he would get some of them in the coming attacks. Oh, yeah, he really hoped he would. He walked fuelled by this anger for three more hours. Determined to reach his destination a few hours before she was due to arrive back. He switched on his old-school walkie-talkie. There was no room for security breaches now. His security officer answered immediately. Raisie was on the cliff, they were in position and no threats had been observed. His people were two local siblings who had been recruited as young children and he relied, he had to rely, on their loyalty. If one or the other had betrayed him, he believed that the other would have spoken up. Anyway, whatever happened, his days were probably at an end and he was looking merely at hours now. He had a plan. A very Tenerifian plan. He arrived and lay down on the ground, falling asleep almost immediately. He was, after all, well into his 13th decade. He had gotten a couple of hours of deep, replenishing sleep before the sister woke him.

Through the binoculars he watched Raisie stretch, pull and climb determinedly toward her goal. This specific wall of rock, even he in his youth wouldn't have challenged himself to conquer. Of course she had the latest security equipment, the newly-invented miniature but extremely powerful parachute in the little pack between her shoulder blades and, of course, the lines that she had fastened in hooks which she'd hammered into the rock as she went. But still, the steepness of that wall. He wouldn't ever, with any security measures, have gone for that awful steepness. In places she would actually have had to climb more lying down and at a horizontal angle.

She was a person he admired, this Raisie. The granddaughter of his life's sweetheart, Lucia. Even

though Lucia had been 15 years older than him, no-one had ever captured his heart like she had. The madness of an infatuation is one thing but his affection for Lucia had never faded. Staying truthful to reality he admitted that his love for her had only grown with time. She never was able to love him back but that fact hadn't helped him to move on. He was bound to her and therefore her family.

He had survived her. Suddenly, a movie played in his head and the realization of the passing of so many years, tens and tens of decades, replayed through his memories. Event upon event, through all this time, hitting him like strong waves. Was it really meant for humans to live this long? he asked. To live this long and have a mind as clear as this and a body still working. He had walked from the coast up to 1000 meters above sea level, steadily upwards without too much effort for his age. Then he'd taken a bus and finally walked into the forest the last 8 kilometers and he wasn't even sore. Why was it bestowed upon him, this curse of extreme longevity? Most people today lived to be 120 or 125. Some made it to his age but then most of them had lost physical or mental health, or both. Had it any purpose or was it just random "luck" for him to be here, in this time, bearing witness to the tearing up of all that was known to him, to his family and heritage, even to all humankind? Was it easier for people who were at peace with this new world? He supposed so and he almost envied them for it.

To carry memories and yearnings that pained him so had fueled his anger and bitterness to huge degrees. So far as to driving him to the random and ruthless hellishness of snuffing out lives. He wasn't the first in his lineage to have an outright disregard for other people's lives, after all that was how most fortunes had been made during the countless millennia. But before the stripping of his family's power and wealth, he and his causing the deaths of others had been mostly about causing "invisible" casualties. Working children and adults to an early demise, some burning out or having other physical or psychological breakdowns. Possibly the segregation that his kind of world brought about had lain behind many ruthless crimes and addictive diseases. Possibly. He had never thought about these things before the recent studies and the dots had been aligned by current researchers. In

front of his followers he had ridiculed the whole study, but he wasn't a stupid person. He could see where causes and effects lined up.

Was his eroded ability for compassion a result of all these years allowing him to cement the values which he had been taught to hold as true? Or had this malignant disregard for human life always been within him? Or, was he actually right? Was humanity a mindless herd of sheep that would eventually cease to exist without being herded? In any which way, he also felt far too, and beyond, old to care about the hows and whys of humanity's core traits except for short reflections like this one. His stand was made and a part of that stand was to go down in a blazing showdown on the old Western film's Main Street, drawing his gun without calling it first. He owed them nothing!

He could only hope that this, his final legacy, would be remembered by someone. He might be held as an example of the worst of human character. His name alongside Hitler, Stalin, Pinochet and Ceausescu. He, an embodiment of all things egotistical and exploitive for the generations to come to do everything to strive away from reinstating. He tried to shut this version out, but even about this he wouldn't lie to himself – he didn't have to keep up appearances.

His focus had dispersed and he was startled by finding himself sitting with an old man's posture, back bent with his stare unfocused at his lap. Maybe now his true age would finally catch up with him. Facing the truth with this much candor would set him crumbling.

He straightened his back and lifted his gaze, the lenses auto-focusing from shaded-close-up-mode to far-sight and sun-screening. He was able to see that Raisie had reached the summit and was climbing into the driver's seat of the Jeep that awaited her there. He had chosen his lookout spot well. If she went swimming as she apparently normally did, it would be another hour or two before she arrived down at the little house. He rose and skidded down the slope, daringly foot-skiing on the thick pine-needle carpet which covered the ground.

He would be waiting for her, hiding nearby, close to the parking space. He regretted having to frighten and force her but this wasn't the universe where he could reveal himself to anyone outside his closest crew, and especially not to a PDD officer. He had to rudely surprise her and then they

would have a chat. *The* chat. How he had looked forward to this. Being able to talk to someone not under his charge. That it was going to be her had always been his plan. Her sharp intellect and amazing ability to follow through with projects, implementing the most incredible ideas, told him that she would be worthy. What a resource she would have been in the fight for their cause, but alas. All was lost. It sank deeper into him and he was almost friends with it. A hated friend is also a kind of friend.

This was most probably going to be his last conversation with another human being. He was glad that it would be with someone whom he, in his own twisted way, respected and cared for. He smiled at that spontaneous feeling, the shock of suddenly being overwhelmed with a notion of love.

God, she looked like her grandmother! And, God, he loved and hated her for that.

RAY

He was feeling better now. His head was coming together from having felt like sharp shattered shards mirroring nonsense. He could quite literally feel his brain healing, physically linking its pieces together again. The days he had spent with his grandmother were becoming clearer. The mist from having been as high as he'd ever managed to get his whole life and on top of that, having worked intensely for a very long time, had made his reality lately heavily unreal. Some of the conversations they'd had the past weekend had begun coming back to him as more than unrelated echoes within unrelated thoughts.

"Where are they placed?" He had put the question to her before dawn on Saturday morning, after she had come back.

"We can't tell you, Ray." She had stroked his hair with both hands and cradled his face. "All you need to know is that it is happening soon. The impact of this will bring the idealists to their knees."

“Have calculations of predicted casualties come through yet?” She had just shook her head at him and he had backed down. He had known that he couldn’t be privy to that information during this mission, but the effects of the drugs erased some of the lines he ordinarily would have known not to cross.

Despite theoretically knowing that he did not have the luxury of being sentimental during this critical phase, he was worried. He hadn’t been able to desensitize himself. He put it down to the detox probably being the cause of wavering in his usual resolve. He suspected that the detonations might cause serious harm to several of his family members. Possibly fatally. He just had to pull through. There was no turning back now.

That Angela had seemed so unfazed by this probable outcome compared to him having such cowardly fears for people who didn’t care at all about what they were trying to achieve, made him question his determination and the sincerity of his motives. Which was good. It gave him cause to fortify his dedication to their cause.

Ensuring the world’s future had to come first. Always, always first. Yet, he had lingering and disturbing anxiety gnawing at him and this shamed him. Often he had to force his determination and he would continue to do so. He had to put his personal feelings aside. The logic of what they were working toward fulfilling weighed heavier than any of his petty fears or sorrows.

His father worked at the LD, as did Emica. His mother worked within the PDD, locally but also within the global committee for reforming socially acceptable structures and laws. He would suspect that the latter would be a no-brainer target. Grandmother used to say that both departments were the most central organizations for the dismantling of the proper order. How they were restructuring social norms had the most dangerous effects for strengthening and worsening this global chaos. She was right and in this region they had their offices in neighboring buildings so they might be two-birds-with-one-stone missions. But he could only speculate.

His eldest sibling Laur’s current and first profession was as a physical- and emotional-recreations guide – a position that was regarded as vastly important to supporting individuals on their

continuous discoveries of healthy life patterns. Personal development tools like these were gifted to everybody these days. From the earliest pre-school years on, to being mandatory throughout school and at workplaces. Having a personal PER-guide was something you could choose to have ongoing all your life if you pleased.

His brother's small company was doing very well. Apparently he was very good at what he did. After the first two years of his self-employment he had been appraised and the quality of his work was considered highly professional and he was recommended by his clients. The people from the Trade and Occupation Revisions Board had agreed and his permit had been filed. Three years later, the company had gone through another appraisal and just three months back his permit had been approved again.

Ray felt a strong resentment toward his brother and his success – he readily admitted that to himself and to anyone who would listen. He often had flash images of Laur's tanned, handsome face and lean, fit body, with the forced "genuine" smile which Ray knew the real face behind. The many fights they had been in when they grew up together and the uncontrolled anger his bigger brother had shown him when they were kids, these were memories Laur's lame excuses couldn't erase. He knew the falsehood behind that wholesome mask. Last time they had met, Ray had told him to change profession – that he would probably cause more harm than good if he carried on. Laur had replied in his most gruesomely condescending tone:

"We were only kids, Ray, but I'm really sorry for not allowing you to play more with me and my friends. Had I known better, I would even have let you have my game-screens all the time! But that's not how children function. I wanted it all for myself – why should I share with you? You who stole all the attention, all the time? That's how I reacted with my undeveloped empathy. I impulsively shut you out. I truly am sorry, but you have to grow out of this Ray! Come on!" Ray had just walked away, stewing – how dare he try to tell him what to feel and not to feel? What an idiot! They could destroy his office and gym for all he cared. Good riddance.

To think of all the people he influenced in society. It was scary to think about it. Angela had told

him that mostly only people with pure motives and influence used to be able to afford such personality strengthening therapies before. No one was considering the dangers of any random person having abilities that allowed them to make personally-empowering decisions. He would think that this was a highly threatening practice. Laur's work place was situated in the middle of the city. Possibly that made him the least vulnerable of his family members when their plans went into effect. But, again, he could only speculate.

Even if his kin weren't at their actual workplaces at the time, many colleagues and close friends of the family would be. He had tried to persuade Angela to bring it to the attention of the central planning groups that primarily, what they should be doing, was destroying servers and communications. Most steps in the process could be carried out without hurting people. He'd raised concerns about creating martyrs at this point of restoring order. It would probably have counterproductive effects on the general public. But he didn't even know how his input had been received. Angela was silent as a rock.

After coming back from a conference a couple of years ago, Angela had informed him that, in the opinion of the majority, "casualties of war" were regarded as necessary. He had accepted this, of course, but inside him it still scratched to think about it. Angela had understood and they'd had long talks about the necessity of relying on the competence of those who had determined their plans of action. She also told him that she, of course, shared his anguish. It was her family too and the danger of martyrs was an important angle.

"But if we tried to persuade them to avoid going to work or such things they would know something was amiss. We cannot give any of them even the slightest inkling of a hint of what is to come. That is why you are left out of the loop, my dearest. To face such consequences is more than difficult to bear. You have to be realistic. We don't even know if we ourselves will survive."

They too might die or be injured. He had been groomed for this since he was a child but still, in his heart, he dreaded such a thing. He understood what she meant and he would do everything not to squeal – he would not be his brother!

He pumped pushups beyond his limit and fell into a sweaty heap on the floor, groaning with what came out as a scream, making him utter a harsh laugh. He forced his resolve until he rejoiced.

Filling his mind with victorious scenarios.

This will be grand. This will be glorious. I shall prevail!

LUCIA

} 10 hours! What a beautiful nights sleep! Angela and I have been eating a slow breakfast in front of the TV. Great shows! I love this new technology that just lets me be sucked into such realistic worlds of sci-fi and fantasy. The effects and the creativeness of the writers! We also bought the latest gadget which creates smell according to signals that trigger the device to arrange molecules, well, don't ask me. Today we saw an episode of a new sci-fi series and the smell of the planet was iron with a tinge of chocolate – I had it look it up afterwards because it smelled very real and unnervingly alien. It was so cool! Even Angela was excited. Yummy – what a delicious morning! Angela is otherwise distant, which is our normal now. At least she wanted to come over to spend a couple of hours with me. I'm bribing her over or to spend time with me elsewhere and I don't care. As long as I get to be close to her a few times a week.

I'm trying to blame her moods on her sixteen-year-old-phase, but not really succeeding at deceiving myself. I tried to explain a bit about what I'm working on but then she got a call from a friend and left rather abruptly. So I guess we'll talk more next time I see her. I don't know if she was "saved by the bell" or if I did her a dis-favor by letting her run off – not that I could have stopped her.

I don't know if this is how it usually is between a parent and a child of sixteen, but I suspect that I just take after the workaholic madness of my own parents. I didn't see too much of them when I

was a kid either. I'll take a week off soon. As long as she seems to be happy, I'm happy. Almost, er, not really. Oh, I'm lying to myself. I just don't know how to prioritize!

Okay, back to reviewing the planning board's meeting. It seems that we are getting to an understanding of some problems which we can agree upon. We've had online meetings with other groups in many corners of the world and at the same time we've been going through written reports from them, others and our local groups.

We're getting closer to beginning to lay down the basics for practical and applicable solutions. It's almost freakishly amazing to see and hear how many, if not most, things are common denominators that we have arrived at in our independent conclusions. It becomes very plain that human beings are alike at the core when the problems and solutions are the same world-wide. In theory it's one thing to know that we are of the same race and share the same needs, wants and responsibilities, but to experience this when sharing such professional information that lies in the development of these outlines makes our global, individual sameness so very much more real! It's absolutely wonderful. As soon as the discussions swayed toward bitterness and anger at the mismanagement of the past we all helped each other to refocus onto the tasks at hand. Building up and bettering instead of tearing down and blaming.

Since the start we have been reviewing endless threads where the topic of consumer habits was brought up. Very often the shame and blame from those early days was focused on producers and/or politicians or other "social classes", countries and so on. Voices screaming for more protest demonstrations and kilometers of written argumentation filled with "logical" wordmongering debates. Those were methods we had used for eons and beyond, always having proven to be completely fruitless. Agitating for centuries on end never brought about lasting, constructive change.

During such reviews it becomes very transparent how we all are human and how we get stuck in thought patterns where hate, urges for violence/resistance and shaming/blaming others will keep us endlessly repeating the destructive traits of yore.

I don't know how many times I had to stop myself mid-sentence when the point I was trying to get through became focused on arguing faults instead of discussing what might work in factual day-to-day life. I always get to the type of discussion where I begin attacking when I'm losing focus. It can be that I'm tired, hungry, angry or just feel left out. Sometimes I also get overpowered by the feeling that all of our work is complete and utter nonsense, even naivety, and then resignation overpowers me. Procrastination takes front seat in a milli-second! My brain just kickstarts thought threads shouting belittling strains of sneering mockery in my head. It's quite scary to watch it happening inside my own brain and not being able to stop it! It is difficult to remold myself from the old mindset of never being good enough into accepting that I'm doing the best I can. That we are doing the best we can. Growing up from kicking for my life to swimming along, enjoying it, improving my strokes and staying calm.

When I get sucked into that belittling mindset I am so glad that we have real-life examples of turning communities and societies around. We are actually turning the ship now. From depleting ourselves and the surrounding world, to this new, truly enriching and accumulative existence. The old systems, what we are used to, are doing to a lot of damage to try and overpower these changes toward bettering the social structures. They are fighting hard and violently, but reminding myself of our steadily increasing successful efforts keep me, and all of us in the committees and work groups, on the straight and narrow simply by continuing our work, one phase at a time. Many police and combat-trained personnel are switching sides too. It's very encouraging to see that they put the futures of their families and friends first, as well as the planet's resources' beneficial management, going against their training which had them drilled into complete unquestioning of authorities. The reality of what is important is leading the human race into the adulthood and responsibility of the species it is meant to be.

"Homo sapiens is leaving adolescence to evolve beyond worshipping the most manipulative players in the playground. We are maturing into assessing big pictures and sharing and building, not sand but brick castles together. And on solid ground. We are courageous when we don't bow down

from setting boundaries when someone takes the spade we forged and calls it their spade. Because the truth of being responsible is saying: ‘Our spade is our spade and if you touch it again I will spade your thieving little hands all the way home to yo’ mama’! A tiny, birdlike woman from India brought down heaps of laughter in the hall with that comment coming out of her in a very matter-of-fact tone of voice as a punch-line as she held the closing speech yesterday.

I’m incredibly thankful for the sense of humor being so spontaneously raw and true during these long sessions! The integrated, positive energy is distinct and vibrates during work sessions all over the world. I guess it’s the dawning realization that we are all of the same “social class” that brings forward this kind of affectionate and naked togetherness. Jokes are flying free. It’s all we have to keep us sane! ~

EMICA and ARUN

She pulled the blanket closer around her. The voices of her family talking softly seeped in through the window which was slightly ajar. Up until a few minutes ago she had been sitting with Mickey, whom she called Grandpapi, even though he was the brother of her actual grandmother, Angela, by blood but Emica never talked to her. Grandpapi Mickey was always there for her and they had talked about the everythings and the nothings of the world, and dinosaurs, for as long as she had memories of him. He always used to say that she was the child, grandchild and person that he was most honored to have the pleasure of loving. Her heart warmed up. He was absolutely the best. Idjun, Laur’s partner, was there with Tinnie, their three-and-a-half-year-old. Idjun was talking with Annah who had brought the child she’d had with Ray, four-year-old Smill. The kids and their friend from next door were screeching while running back and forth in zig-zags across the lawn. The laughter at someone’s witty remark and Laur’s family’s energetic little puppy Kelby, yapping his

happy little head off. It all just made her cry even harder.

She sat upstairs on the bed of her childhood bedroom. The walls were stripped of her favorite band and Peace posters, thankfully also of the clutter she'd always managed to pile on the desk and the floor. Right now her childhood was a hazy memory, but the smell still lingered and brought emotions she couldn't quite pinpoint. Memories of her dreams and aspirations surfaced and in her present state of mood they made her moan in agony. Nothing had worked out the way she had wanted! Nothing! And she had worked so bloody hard!

Arun gave a soft knock on the door and when he heard her groan he mistook the sound for an acknowledging welcome, so he just pulled the door open and stepped inside.

"We're missing you downstairs..." he froze mid-sentence at the sight of her red-rimmed eyes and just sounded an "Oooh", which was met with silence from the bed, followed by a small sniffle from a lowered head.

"Sorry! Should I stay or should I go now?" Out of the blue the century-and-a-half-plus-old Clash rock classic just popped out. He often covered sudden discomfort with off-the-top-of-his head not-so-comic but awkwardly meant-to-be-comic utterings. She shook her head, which kept him standing where he stood, bewildered at what that meant exactly, stretching his mouth sideways, making the confused face. She glanced up and managed to wave him in, her hand making wiggly gestures under layers of blanket. Hastening him inside, she whispered hoarsely:

"Close it! Please."

Silently he clicked the door shut and eased himself onto the bed beside his child.

"What's up Sunshine?"

Emica gave him a miserable face, lowering her eyelids, shaking her head. He waited.

"I worked so bloody hard," she voiced. "It was so close! There were only three of us left and I was so sure I was going to nail it. But, no – I wasn't good enough. I really, really wanted it, Daddy!"

Arun hadn't heard her calling him that in ages. It was a very, very long time since any of his

children had used that word for him. He liked it, but knew what it meant. She really must be in a tough spot. He kept silent, pulling up at the blanket to cover her shoulders, helping her cocoon properly and then stroked her hair. The sobs came and went, hiccups ensued and in a few minutes she was calmer.

She began to explain herself.

“I understand the process. I mean I am on the education- and career-choice planning committee for life’s sake! Like, I mean, just because you really, really want to be an actor doesn’t mean you have the talent for it – I know all that.” He laughed – had he really told that story that many times? Emica continued as if she hadn’t heard him, which she probably hadn’t in her worked-up state.

“But this is my profession of choice and I am talented! I’ve even been a consultant planner on this project! How could *I* not be the one sent to Greenland to start it off? You know?! It’s just not fair!”

Arun firmly cradled her back, drawing his face into the stern empathic mode, nodding and softly gazing at her straight in the eyes.

He thought to himself:

“Be silent. Don’t fix her. Just listen. Smile carefully. And shut up!” He smiled. Caring. Silently. Good job!

She glanced up, confirming that she was being accepted, nodded at him and summoned up more energy for a new attack on the unfairness of the miserable world.

“I was even one of the people with the most ideas for the basic framework! Well, at least one of the three with the most ideas.” She groaned again and energetically shook her head, reminding him of a wet dog. “This is not fair!”

Arun turned up the volume of the monologue in his head:

“Be quiet! Let her be bitter and grieve!”

He focused on stroking her hair, careful not to let his protective emotions get the better of him. He really would like to pull strings right now. The huge No-No.

“I mean, if I had dreams of working as an author or an actor or even a sportsperson, but was lousy

at it then I would have had to face the facts and go for those aspirations as a hobby – you know like my choir and the sports events I go to all the time, you know, but in this field I am NOT AN AMATEUR! How could they just leave me out of this start-up?! How?!”

She was so frustrated. She let herself feel to the core that she would never ever, and then some, get over this! She would make changes in the guidelines for project recruitments so that no one would have to go through something like this in the future! Ensuring professionals a spot solely judged on degrees of involvement in the pre-development phases! She would change the whole training system if she had to! Grrr-dammit!!!

Feeling her feelings with no filter. Letting all her disappointment out with no inhibitions. Going into the free-flow of her thoughts and emotions. She had to deal with this right now or it would consume her.

Instantaneously she dove deep inside and was transported back to a childhood remembrance of her parents telling her:

“No, you can’t tell your friend that they have to give you their toy. It’s *their* toy.”

But, oh, she had loved that toy. She craved it. They just didn’t understand how much. She had wanted to have it now. Not to do chores to get one for herself *later*. The urge of fulfilling the want right now was throbbing inside her. Stupid, stupid world!

Feelings and memories from that distant past flooded her awareness. The room with Arun, her current dismay, all of it faded out, making room in her mind to let thoughts surface and come and go freely. The now seemed irrelevant, almost surreal, the only important thing now was that toy. She was taken back, suffering at how much she had wanted it, re-feeling when she had tried to sneak it from her friend. There and then she had tried to run away with it. She started at that memory and couldn’t believe it at first, but she had actually tried to take it. She felt she had the right to. There was no thought of the pain she would cause. The wrong she committed toward her friend. The only feeling was righteousness and having a never-wavering goal.

The toy was a beautiful miniature house in bold colors. It was almost as tall as she. It had

furniture that would flatten out of and into the floors and walls. You could easily fit it into its small designer backpack-box which was decorated with intricate, enchanting figurines. The windows of the house opened by themselves when you told them to with curtains that fluttered in the warm breeze on her childhood patio. She remembered saying “hammock” and soundlessly the thinnest sliver opened up in the toy’s lawn allowing a flat object to appear, and as the sliver closed up again the hammock was unfolding itself. In a few seconds it sat there on a spot by a silver birch near the thick bordering treeline.

The little toy-people, who were stored in a separate space inside the box, played with her as well as among themselves. She remembered them chattering and expressing emotions, playing at throwing tiny, bouncy balls and playing hide-and-seek in the big house. They could even cook, serving deliciously scented play-foods on miniature platters and bowls. They would make ever-so cute sounds when they were laughing and giggling, cheering or even crying which they did so especially heart-moving. And when they played or if there wasn’t enough activity from the humans and you hadn’t told the toy to pause, the dolls would form sentences, encouraging the children to play different games:

“Dress up! Let’s play dress-up! I’ll wear the red sneakers that you like so much!” or “Come on! Let’s explore the house! It was a while ago since we visited the attic!”

Oh, she had wanted that toy. And she had wanted to have it right now! Her mind moved. Now... Yes, time to get back to now. She could see and feel better now.

Arun felt her go limp against his shoulder and knew what that meant. She was going into an emotional work-through meditation. He felt enormous gratitude toward her having these tools to sort out what was going on inside her. The idea of that kind of emotional searching was one that he had been introduced to as early as in preschool. The importance of the school system guiding children in matters of the mind had been taken seriously since the 2020s. The Practice of Mental Health, MH, as a mandatory subject had taken off in schools world-wide at that time because of young people’s psychological health being extremely vulnerable. It had worsened frighteningly

when the old systems of dis-ruling were escalating and threatening humanity's very future. The consequences of children and young people breaking down and horrifyingly following the impulses to take their own lives en masse forced countries around the world to act.

These very young people, who ought to have been aspiring and developing into their fuller potential of becoming better than the previous generations. Expanding on favorable knowledge passed on by the adults before them. They that were meant to enhance and explode into billions of mind-boggling creators in a safe and brilliant world. What they met instead was a disregard for all the resources of the planet and those young wonderers had their personal resources and potential smothered and deadened. Too many of them couldn't handle it. Suicides where horribly the solution far too many of those bright, bright souls sought instead.

The studies that had been collected from different geographical areas in the world where such practices were taught to children, had showed significantly better levels of mental health amongst their young. So, because of the profound horror of these suffering generations, providing all children with tools to improve their mental wellbeing had been given utmost priority over all other areas everywhere in the world. Within five years after the practice of MH had become mandatory, the beneficial results were clearly showing. It was starkly evident within the children's and youth's activities outside the home. The earliest work groups setting the basic outlines for this subject would later evolve into being a significant part of today's Learning Department.

Compared to modern schooling the learning systems before MH are a scary tale akin to medieval hammering holes into people's heads to let out evil spirits. He could only shudder at the difficulties humans must have faced before the understanding had dawned about the essential necessity of taking care of one's mental balance on a daily basis. Thankfully it was as natural as eating to the global community of today. All activities outside the home have moments in their daily schedule for mind care. This had been so for as long as he could remember.

The beginning of the last century had been a horrible nightmare because people subconsciously were sorely plagued by living in a world that was so insensitive. The dawning of the internet

suddenly gave them a lot of information, much of which showed the clash between all the good that could be done and the mindless destruction that actually was being done. It all became such an awfully-difficult contradiction to process and, globally, the stress ate away at individual minds. The young were helpless as dependents on an adult generation that didn't seem to care but in truth were too desperately incapable of taking care of themselves to be able to care, and so the young and the adults folded under a subconscious weight of despair, draining their constructive life energies.

Suddenly the glaring truth of the procrastinating of that adult generation, who weren't even close to the role models the young ones needed, stared humanity in the face. Through the horrifying deaths of their children.

There were sad bunches of idols, many of them musical "stars" and glorified actors, who were considered to be role models for the world back then. But they themselves and the media covering their personal lives weren't using the influence they had to convey anything even close to wholesome inspiration. There was no safe place for the young. Nor for the adults who themselves had been raised in this type of society.

Then, thankfully, the human race couldn't stand idly by anymore – the Bettering took off. There was no other way forward.

Gratitude tingled inside Arun's every cell when he contemplated the hard work of his predecessors. Those who had made it possible for him to sit here today. The simple actions, MH and the huge consumer discipline, had taken humanity a few, but hard-working, reforming years. The responsibility had been taken by the human population as a whole to finally begin giving their children the rich Earth and the possibility to continue humanity's evolution. Well, at least very nearly the whole population.

The results of this mature stand, of throwing the responsibility where it should lay. Into people's own laps. This show of responsible action from the adult population had begun swinging the children back to health.

Statistics plummeted regarding suicides among the young and mental health became the most

important subject from the cradle onward. Since this focus was new to most people the guidance in emotional work-through practices, other self-awareness and self-appreciative exercises, primarily became the responsibility of schools and workplaces. Most parents and other adults had no experience with MH in those days. Everyone was in sore need of inner growth and humanity was redirecting itself to hopes for a better future.

To think that such “little” things were what had been missing for Homo sapiens to become a mature species, thought Arun. Growing up as a responsible race. The old saying of cleaning up one’s own backyard before accusing others. Everyday Joes, Jos and Josies were beginning to possess the capacity for fulfilling their fuller potential and began creating this sci-fi paradise in our own world.

With such simple actions the mis-rulers of the past were just sidestepped. Violence and protests had never gotten the job done in thousands of years, but this action of taking personal responsibility did. It seems so logical to people today because we can see the results, Arun thought, but sometimes he thought of how it must have seemed to people back then. It must have been beyond difficult to see past the old ways. He admired them immensely for it and he thanked them for having had the courage to act by stepping out on such a brittle limb.

He thought of his Ray, his beloved back-striver. He felt his love for him and closed his eyes letting that feeling flow. He needed to feel the love for his lost little boy. And so, sitting beside his struggling Emica, there they were, letting their breaths be the sounds that filled the room around them. The sounds from the garden flowing, bringing hope as only joy could, into this little room of questions, worries and sorrows.

He listened to her calm, rhythmic breaths and he knew she would be fine. Those disappointments of youth. Of course there were disappointments at his age too, but the ones of youth could seem so insulting, in such a “never-ever-having-happened-in-this-particularly-unfair-way-to-a-n-y-o-n-e-else-before” kind of way.

He always tried so hard at setting aside his impulse and not acting to “fix things” when difficult

situations bore down on any one of his family members. Well, truth be told, even friends and random people sometimes. Simply restraining himself and just being there without stepping in or offering solutions all the time. The knowledge that leaving Emica to solve this on her own would strengthen her own ability to navigate through life, helped him go against that impulse.

He knew from experience that having been left to search within himself had made him develop better patience and stronger “intuition”, for want of a better word. But the impulse to step in and offer solutions to other people’s issues would sometimes win and he would go all in to offer suggestions even though he had not been asked to.

Sometimes knowing things was not truly understanding – being just that, the vast difference between reciting theory and being able to actually act the way he actually knew how to. In other words, true knowledge versus theorizing.

It was exciting to be human in this new evolution of his species. The redefinition of power and wealth going from “achieving more” to “gaining bettering”. From glorifying the ability of fighting off threats to becoming an enabler of furthering the rights and obligations as individuals knowing that we exist in co-existence. Humanity evolving from speeding towards its own depletion to cherishing and excelling at true development. Being in awe when regarding the wealth - the true value - of both people and material resources. This was the real proof of the human race beginning to have practical knowledge of anything, really. Knowing by doing things of real importance, of true value, was the key to true progression.

He thought of Raisie and hoped she was being able to enjoy her favorite island. He wished he could be there – he would get his turn. He was planning on going para-gliding soon. Fun had to exist in their lives alongside the troubles. That was life. The last people to have stayed in the cabin had apparently been two university students from India on holiday. These days not only a lucky few were able to enjoy the planet in that way. Which students in the old days would have been able to book such a lovely recuperation retreat for two whole weeks if they hadn’t been among the thousandth of the thousandth who had been able to monetarily afford it?

He almost laughed out loud at the bizarreness of the world's disorder just a few decades back. How could the values of wealth have been so shallow? Wealth today meant having quality during your lifespan. Such an easy evaluation to make of what it meant to be rich in your life. But of course it didn't always feel like he and his family were rich. Not when you really, really wanted something. Like Ray to be okay or Emica to be spared from disappointment.

The fine line between working hard, realizing your limitations and reaching a goal without manipulating those around you. All those things that were so important when guiding children in understanding true values, or guiding yourself for that matter! He had still inherited the envious and hoarding thought patterns from generations upon generations before him. Really, not that strange when he thought about how easily he was influenced by those around him.

Emica stirred and moaned. It was a less disgruntled moan than before and he watched her as she opened her eyes, searching for his face and then giving him a small smile.

"Do you remember Aly's toy-house?" She asked with a sore throat's voice, shaking her head as he burst into laughter at this most sudden turn of reality.

"Aruuun!!!"

"Ahayyy," he managed, "was that where your journey took you right now?" Unrestrainably amused, his body shook with laughter, helplessly nodding his head. "Oh, yes, absolutely. And you were almost out the gate with their most precious toy. Out the gate of your own home!" Now they both screeched and tears flowed.

"So, that's the feeling, eh? That bad?"

"Yeah. I'm tearing down the whole evaluation- and selective board's rules in my head right now. I really need to go deep with this one. I understand, theoretically, that the ones chosen have more experience than I do. That I need to trust that there were intelligently based reasons behind their choices and their "not choice" of me, but I'm still going to trash them all!" She grimaced an experimental grin. "I see it but I don't feel it. Yet. But on the other hand, I also have three months of leave stored up," she grinned broader than broadly. "I've worked and studied overtime far too

much this past year, so I might just ask if I can come along on my own travel budget and without a position on the team.” She glanced, trying to read his expression. He remained stony-faced. “Just to watch and help if I should be needed, you know. I might learn something in the process. Plus it would be great to have a free schedule to explore Greenland and the ocean. Think of the diving out there! It must be amazing.”

He tousled her unruly hairdo.

“Yupp! That’s my girl! Work around it. I’m so proud of you. That would be the greatest adventure. Book a cabin as soon as you know and get your work schedule sorted!” His face fell flat. “Did I just do that! Did I just tell you, the most ambitious educational planner I know, how to fix her life to the best of *my* ability? Darn! Just erase those last 15 seconds, please!” He stood and pulled her up, both rising laughing and then they made their way downstairs. She detoured toward the bathroom to “un-puff” her face before meeting the others.

She stopped in the doorway looking his way just as he turned back around to look at her. She mouthed a smiling “thank you”, blowing him a kiss that thumped straight into his heart. The feeling of being present got acutely real, stamping the moment deeply into his bank of eternal nows. Their shared smiles would probably butterfly-effect ignite a sun somewhere, someday, he thought.

It was a beautiful afternoon and while moving toward the gathering of loved ones, Arun could almost sense the air being thickened by summer scents, the calm but somewhat heavier warm breezes stroking his skin. A time to celebrate and enjoy the company of everyone gathered in the garden. Reveling in the love they all felt for each other, deeply intertwined within the missing and mourning of those who wouldn’t be a part of this wonderful, joyful crisis of a day.

LUCIA

} The wonder of the intelligence and capacity of the people I have the honor to work alongside is flooring me! The workable ideas that come out of these people's brains! To think that such competence has been headhunted, locked away for eons. Hoarded behind binding contracts of secrecy and penny-pinchingly guarded from shining their light for facilitating the protection and forwarding of humanity. So many people's potential only being picked for the lushest bits to enhance the monetary capacities of their fake - and humanity's, more to the point - destructive leaders. Such exquisite talent dismembered, kept isolated and in hiding, their incentives only being taken advantage of. Useful only to those who could pay. Or buried if the idea threatened the profits of other, more-coveted ones already out there.

Genius and innovative minds never being used for alleviating the actual hurdles facing mankind. Today we're seeing these minds focused toward being exponentially valuable. Valuable as in the core meaning of the word "valuable". Invaluable, brilliant minds putting their ideas to use for humanity's evolutionary expansion. Countless colleagues of mine had remarkable development skills that never reached humanity as a whole before. They had been treated like any sector's resources. Closed off from the big picture and being bled dry. Humanity blindly following the illogical illusions of what grandeur meant. Leaving the fate of our planet in the hands of a very few short-sighted billionaires and dictators. Thankfully, consumers brought that false opposite of development to its knees!

I see myself shaming and blaming our old survival strategies again. I do understand, at least theoretically, that it's thanks to our race's definitions of leadership in the past that our technology and possibilities for a better future have been developed – it's just that the thought of this utter waste of human genius gets to me sometimes. Instead of these people's skills having been used for the bettering of a modern world, they've been concealed and even used for pushing us backwards. Keeping us in the Dark Ages and worse. So, on top of the obvious segregatory consequences for the individual caused by monetary strategies, this kind of hoarding of genius has been actively and with maddening speed, hurtling us toward annihilation on every level.

Well, we had a session with the stress management coach the other day and he said (which I of course recorded):

“When we think about writing a whole book it completely overwhelms most of us. When we think of making a rough outline and then focusing as much as possible on writing one paragraph at a time, it all becomes more do-able. We are more likely to fulfil a task when it seems airy and inspiring for our mind to taste and handle. Then the project at hand becomes manageable, even through the tough chapters. In my experience, this goes for all things in life. As the old wisdom states – each day has enough of its own challenges. So, for sure, make a plan for the larger picture, just as you are doing here, and then let each day, each task, each moment, be enough in its own right. We will not be changing the world – we will only be changing our own selves by fulfilling the goals we are setting up for each and every single day. Goals which may well be for bettering ourselves and therefore affecting the world around us.”

Thanks to computers and the internet we can learn from each other, all over the globe. We have the tools to begin organizing a society that works for our communities, regions and continents and therefore for the betterment of our species on a global scale. But it all originates in the one paragraph at a time. The little things I can do today will influence the evolution of humanity as a whole. The mind-boggling goal of “changing the world” has suddenly become manageable!

Dictators, profiteers, procrastinating politicians and our worship of so many entertaining but, in the big picture, useless idols is an obsolete path and I am done sinking my world! One day at a time I will worship myself for being responsible and doing grand things! One paragraph, one step, one day at a time.

Taking a break. Taking care of myself to be able to take care of others and that’s all that matters. Angela’s 20th is coming up. I don’t know if she’ll come home for it, but if she does I’ll be here for her! A “little” too late, but I can’t undo the past. ~

SIMON

He turned around and waved, peering back in through the window in the door which had swung softly shut behind him. Pets in all shapes and sizes were stylishly engraved into the glass around the name The Best for Your Best. When he saw Simran making the visible effort to stretch above the heads of his two eager apprentices to be able to catch his eye and smiling the widest smile in response to Simon's wave, he melted inside. Simon was sustained by his child's love for him and the kid, or rather adolescent, could ask anything of him and he would do it. Luckily there was another parent and a world of other people who had taught his child something about boundaries and manners. Under Simon's sole care Simran would doubtlessly have been spoiled rotten.

The self-worth that shone from the somber expression of Simran's face and the body posture that told of self-appreciation, was something Simon himself had never known as a child and much less in later years. In his childhood family, great importance had been given to not asking too much and just keeping your head low, doing what you were told. He grew up in the early decades of the new school system and had received much guidance and practice with his sense of self. The new ways of guiding children into their futures as professionals was based on learning self-awareness as well as developing and discovering individual interests, talents and capabilities. This was evidently resulting in very stable societies world-wide. On the micro scale, results could be seen in increasing individual capabilities for solving conflicts and managing healthy relationships privately and in the workplace. But back in his school days, he was still very much under the thumb of his parents and their learned experiences from their own upbringing which influenced their notions of how to raise a child.

His parents and their parents had come from a time when behavioral science was in its infancy. People in general were very much in the hands of benevolence for their existence, as it had been since humanity's infancy, and there had been a lot of fear-based rules and shame steering him into

adulthood. Why fear had rooted itself deeper in him than in many of his peers he didn't know.

His upbringing had been middle-class and there had never been material wants in his home, but as to emotional and motivational support, his parents hadn't known much more than their parents and his grandparents before them. A tone of achieving, solely based on the fear of becoming redundant was how he could best describe the hereditary traits of his parents' subconscious drive. And he still had great difficulties getting past that incentive which he had been born and drilled into living by. Maybe it was because he had been recruited at such a young age and had never developed a trust for the evolutionary advancement of the world that was being created around him. He knew now that he had realised the joy of its' possibilities far too late.

Even though today's society was based on opposite values to those and that the risk of being shunned or an outcast in life were just not realistically possible anymore, those inherited factors of fear lived on and expressed themselves in his spontaneous reactions more often than he would like to admit. Thankfully, his child had gotten one more generation away from that old stick and dried-up and meagre carrot.

He watched as the three people inside Simran's pet salon returned their focus to the unruly fur of a charming and sassy Cockapoo. The handful of a dog, wagging its whole backside, charmingly doing everything to distract the humans while being firmly but diligently coerced to stand still on the grooming table. Under Simran's full attention and instruction, one of the apprentices fastened the little dog's harness to the line hanging from the ceiling while the other tried to begin trimming its eagerly whisking tail.

Simon had not been surprised when this choice of career had been what came up. Simran had been drawn to any animal ever since Simon could remember. That magnetic pull combined with a talent for entrepreneurship and teaching had been a failsafe recipe for this combined salon, trainee location and pet owners' service. The reviews that The Best for Your Best had gotten from the very beginning were spectacular. A huge part of Simon's decision to move here three years ago had been based on Simran's business venture getting off to such a successful start.

Stepping away, out onto the pavement, he glanced back one last time, then turned quickly away as he felt the pain in his throat just before the tears welled up. His chest and face contracted with fear and sorrow which he had determinedly held back for this brief visit, giving the love for Simran his full focus. He pushed forward, forcing himself away from his precious child.

He grabbed a latte at the coffee wagon on the corner and then slipped into the park. He walked briskly, deeper along the pathways to find “his” secluded spot. He was so afraid now that he trembled. He had to hold the cup away from his body because tiny drops were escaping, splashing through the tiny hole in the top of the mug. He wanted to at least look proper in front of his co-workers at the department.

It had been a long time since he had experienced this level of sheer fright. He was used to living with a constant simmering alertness to impending danger but not to this kind of acute fear. Ever since he had left active Reactionist status he had never known how any day would end, or begin for that matter. But before his defection there had also always been fear. The constant terror of being found out or somehow carelessly revealing himself by thoughtlessly conveying his values. That fear had grown especially strong since he had begun revising those oppositional ideas, which he had been doing ever since his beloved Simran had been born into the world. That was when he had begun, in secret, to feel admiration for the social system his child would be living within.

His doubts had started when his partner was still pregnant and he realised the wondrous possibility he would enjoy of having parental leave for 320 days. He could space his days into periods of his own choosing during the child’s first four years, and they would be regarded as full-time work so he still gathered his bonuses. The same went for taking leave if Simran became ill. Then, bit by bit, he discovered all the other benefits which were in store for his child and himself, especially of how daycare and schooling were organized. He felt the gratitude toward working hours and periods having been so hugely reduced since the old days. He felt hopeful and scared beyond his wildest dreams, all at the same time. He immediately realized what his treacherous thoughts were going to result in him having to do.

As Simran got older, his whole indoctrination from the Reactionist movement was toppled. He began consciously admitting to himself that he had been duped. That he had been lured to oppose these basic human rights by his fears of somehow being left without. Of being denied the charitable benevolence of his superiors in the movement. He remembered the horror he'd felt when he'd realized that betrayal was the path he was embarking on. But, he would rather betray that elitist, backward-striving movement than betray his beloved Simran's right to have a rich and humane future. To realise that his child would grow up in a world that offered every person the foundation to be able to create a marvellous life for themselves, within completely realistic goals, made his choice a no-brainer.

The indisputable lie he had been fed about laziness or lack of determination being the source of a person not being "successful" was glaring him straight in the face. With the educational system being what it was in reality today, there weren't any fear-based grounds for individual failure. He felt appalled at himself for having believed these lies for so long. How could he have been so frozen by his upbringing that the evolution of the past century had completely passed him by? Sitting here, all these years later, on a park bench, trembling out of fear and clutching a cold cup of shaken coffee, he still couldn't wrap his mind around that one.

How deep did the fear of being left without run? Was it faultily wired animal instinct that had kept him blindly grasping for "safety"? Was he trying to crawl back to the irresponsibility of infancy by refusing to let go of his ancestors' mindset? How could he not have seen and embraced the functioning true safety and prosperity of this new management of the world? How?

Was it that his reptile brain was distorted, unable to redirect itself, screaming for sustenance and security in a poisoned environment? An environment that had polluted his intellect from seeing that he was pursuing a goal that in actuality was going to ruin him?

Just like the majority of the world's countries had in the 1900s when they turned a despising, blind eye to the few societies that had tried doing things differently. Before the old ways crept back in, some countries had actually prospered beyond anything previously known to mankind, simply

by allowing their citizens the most equal rights any society had ever accomplished in the known history of humanity.

Holding onto the not-working, dis-orderly societies had been perceived as safer, even though it clearly was not. He could see these things logically but his deeper understanding of it, of himself and his drives, was another matter entirely. He needed help to reach discernment of the plausible causes of all his hows and whys.

He longed for therapy. To be able to be honest about all these things, to get the help he needed to gain clarity. Despite working within the PDD and rehabilitation, having had many clients with these problems, terrorist and criminal backgrounds, he hadn't been able to understand or heal himself. He knew that he needed to tell another person. To share his deepest secrets. To bring himself out of the darkness he had within and to let his past come to light, to have discussions to come to an understanding of himself and, hopefully, to gain some peace. He was tired to the bone of this endless chase.

Since they had conceived Simran, the last quarter of a century had edged very slowly forward. An awfully drawn-out process had brought him to this final capitulation. Aside from the beneficial evolutionary aspects, there had been many other factors helping to make this road ever so slightly less agonizing for him to tread.

About ten years ago his regional fraction of the Reactionist movement had suddenly not been able to get in touch with any others in their different locations around the world. His team had then stumbled in the dark for another couple of years until it became more and more difficult and dangerous to even try to contact the operatives in your own fraction. Toward his final stepping out, about six years ago, he hadn't been able to meet up with anyone in his closest area for a while. No one else had shown up for the last gathering he'd gone to. After that, he himself hadn't attended the next scheduled one and therefore he didn't know if anyone else had come either. He'd also noticed that he didn't meet any of the other Reactionists in the street anymore. He suspected that they had moved away. Defected to areas where no one would recognize them.

Toward the end of his involvement, it had only been the fear of retribution which had kept him defining himself as active. He was a very careful person, prone to almost obsessively securing his options, which of course was what had brought him to join the opposing movement to begin with.

The guarantees he'd been promised in the restored, glorious future had been of always being well-protected and of having abundant resources at his command. What had especially lured him at that young age were all the safeguards for any contingencies concerning the wellbeing of himself and if he were to have a family in the future. These were factors which had eased his fears and had made him join the ranks at the same age as Simran was now. As time progressed and climate change was being halted and societies all over the globe were pulling themselves into solid, manageable and securer conditions, he had begun to waver in his determination to fight for the cause, but only subconsciously. He could see now that he'd held an undefined longing for the serenity and safety that this new world offered, but his fears were stronger and it was many years before he let those doubts get a front seat in his mind.

At long last, his final step away and into the reality of the present had been easy to take on the practical level. He had figuratively held his child in his mind's eye and leapt, head first, into a new existence. Into a world which was obviously prospering into successfully fulfilling the goals which the Reactionists had taught him to doubt, ridicule and loathe.

No one knew that he had defected. Of course not. Why would he have told anyone? When he had finally made the decision, he moved geographically and relocated from his previous work place to here. And at that time his fellow operatives had been out of any type of contact for more than two years. He had simply vanished from an Reactionist cell that was no longer active, and in truth, in his heart, he had already made the re-evaluation into trusting and, frankly, liking this new way of human existence. He began working within his occupation at the branch of Rehabilitation and Correctional Development within the PDD and had gotten Raisie as a colleague. Soon they and their families had become close friends.

And now, he had to come clean. He had to risk the love of his only child. He had to risk

everything. He broke down, crouching, dropping the coffee which splashed all over his trousers and howled like an animal facing being brutally severed from its flock. He couldn't do it! But he had to do it, he couldn't *not* do it, but how could he?!

He had to focus hard on breathing deeply, in and out. The last thing he needed was for someone to come up to him where he sat, trying for his life to gather courage. Hiding, surrounded by the small glade's cover of high bushes, he focused everything he had on calming down. Visualizing the positive thing he was about to do, the overpowering load he was going to get off his chest. Breathe! He couldn't break down now. If he broke down here in the park, the first thing anyone would do would be to call Simran and Simon knew that he wouldn't be able to lie to him anymore. He regained control of his heartbeat. He had to come clean at work first, before Simran could know. If he could get the chance to do some good, then maybe he would be granted the love of his child again some day. He automatically brushed his trouser legs which were soaked in coffee, but stopped himself when he realised that he soon would be wearing institutional pants.

It was time to go. He rose, began walking, while letting his thoughts flow freely as he put one foot determinedly in front of the other.

He was in his mid-eighties and Simran was only 24. Before he became a parent he had been a successful legal expert and approached very early by the present PDD. Within the first year of having completed his senior education he'd been recruited by the movement and soon he'd sat in meetings with Reinar himself. That man knew how to put things. This was at a time when violent countermeasures to hinder the new global developments were frequent and many people within administrations world-wide were murdered. Reinar had woven catastrophic scenarios of impending doom which would end the human race if this anarchy was not snuffed out, nipped in its bud. Lectures and speeches on end, which Simon had swallowed hook, line and sinker with the greatest ease. The blood spilled had been blamed on the madness and naivety of uprooting humanity from everything that had brought her this far. Simon's fear of losing his future, his inherited insecurities and lack of insight had made him an easy catch. Much later when Simran had brought home his

history homework and they'd sat going over the late 1800s and early 1900s, another picture of the old world order had begun to form in his mind.

There were countries in Scandinavia, where terribly impoverished populations had suddenly begun getting their basic needs provided by their governments. Over just a few decades in the first half of the 1900s, the results that these changes had made for those few million individuals and their productivity was unquestionably remarkable. The logic of people getting food on a daily basis, housing and schooling and, on top of that, free or at least very affordable healthcare, child care and family planning, were evidently recipes for a society to begin flourishing. Those populations had gained what is defined as wealth in today's world. The impact those populations made on the global community, despite being a mere 20 to 30 million individuals, were the non-disputable effects of those basic needs being fulfilled.

To counter that, they read about other populations and regions that had been exploited for huge private monetary fortunes. He saw Reinar's strategy and agenda with sudden clarity. Simon had risen from the table, abruptly leaving his puzzled child with the homework, making up an excuse of having forgotten some appointment. He had just had to get out of the house.

He felt like that now, but worse. He remembered how he had rudely become aware of the naked truth of Reinar's and the movement's double standards and was strengthened by the memory of the insight he had gained that afternoon all those years ago and it motivated him to keep on walking. In five minutes he would finally drop his pretense. He picked up his pace.

A figurative likeness surfaced of his previous values being that of an ancient Roman, a believer in the old mythical, god-like three weavers of fate. As if his Reactionist commitment would have appeased some threatening entities who would then hopefully grant him a fruitful life. The belief that some people were fated or "meant" to enjoy certain measures of the good life during their lifespan while others, well, most people, were "meant" to suffer, toil and be forgettable. It was all a naive superstition! He was appalled at seeing it this clearly. Millennia of a ruling belief system based on utter nonsense! A so called elite defending its right to rule with a medieval concoction of

superstitious, fatalistic hogwash and, to top that off, they had been making a horrifying mess of most things that they were supposedly the caretakers of. He laughed out loud, turning heads on the pavement. He had to let out some of the steam or he would faint from the stress of it all. One foot in front of the other!

The destructive future which he had been fed by the elitist back-strivers of the opposition had never come to pass! Instead, in this reality, the world had become a place of seemingly endless prosperity. Sure, if he chose to be lazy then porridge and much less luxury would be his lot, but if he worked and contributed to the best of his ability, then the fruits he could reap would be what only a thimble full of people would have enjoyed up until only 100 years ago. He actually blushed at his incapacity to not have seen this earlier. His fear had closed his mind's eye from these simple truths.

He was taken back to other homework sessions with Simran, looking at real wealth. The wealth when he soaked in the stars radiating from his child's innermost harmony and pride at learning important things. Sitting at that kitchen table taking in his miraculous and proud little kid eagerly showing off. Proudly explaining the knowledge of important school stuff which the teachers had encouraged their students to deepen their understanding of by telling their grown-ups all about.

Reliving moments such as those over and over in his mind. He saw Simran, quite literally strutting colorful feathers about the kitchen, glowing with the joy of learning. His beautiful self-appreciative and safe child had made him think of all the other children across the globe who were, in this modern world, getting the same chance as his own. Bright and developing children soaking in their pride at learning, understanding and being listened to.

He clutched at the edges of his coat, closed his eyes and strengthened his resolve. He saw the office high-rise now. He was going in to work and he was going to reveal himself for who he truly was, or rather, who he had lied and masked about having been.

He would offer his aid in extracting information about what the hell was going on. He was terribly certain that Ray and Angela were hiding something. Something horrid. He had worked on both

sides of the law with these issues for far too long to be deceived. There was an imminent threat. He could almost feel the air thickening when he had observed the initial interrogation sessions with both Ray and Angela. The conclusions that had been reached by tracing known Reactionist operatives' movements had also shown that those active terrorists had made many atypical routes all across the world. Also they had intercepted attempted and completed forms of communication but the code used had not been cracked yet. The type of action gave hints of a threatening picture that was more apparent to him than to his colleagues. It was as if the Reactionists came out into the open to hide something but also because they no longer thought that they had anything worse than being apprehended to fear.

There had been several raised eyebrows yesterday when he had asked to see the work they were doing in the terrorist team, since it wasn't his department. But no one had denied him. He had seen the glances that some of them had shared and he guessed that he might have stirred some intuitive nerves by the way he'd acted. And sweated.

There was no turning back now. He was glad that Raisie wasn't here to witness this.

He swung the door open, walked up to the reception desk, blipped his wrist and in a mechanical tone interrupted the hearty greeting from the elderly man sitting behind the counter:

"My name is Simon Henderson and I am hereby defecting from the Reactionist movement. Please call for my administrative handler."

RAISIE

One stroke after the next. Flip turn, kicking, stroke, air, kicking, stroke, air, onward, onward, flipping. The meditative flow let her mind shut down completely. It was as if she became one with the powerful swirl of energy, moving within it as a part of the body of sparkling water, her flow as

whole as the pool itself. Swimming in the warmth of the Tenerife air and heated pool made her feel indistinguishable from the elements surrounding her. She savored that her brain went silent, something that she rarely experienced in any other setting. When her reminder tingled in her wrist, without thinking she interrupted the signal with one long and one short twitch of her pinky, activating the ten minutes snooze. She knew she could put off coming out for a little while longer. She deserved this. She upped her pace a bit and disappeared back into the relished silence of her mind.

Later, in the sauna, her whole body felt like a well-pumped muscle, she loved feeling this firm and strong. The window looking out over the garden showed the sun past its zenith, hovering just above lush trees. Raisie knew that later in the evening the sun would disappear behind the wall surrounding the villa, and if she climbed to sit on that wall she would be able to see it setting on the horizon of the Atlantic. But today she was not staying that long.

She had to sit on the lowest bench in the sauna or she would faint. This was not something that she enjoyed for more than five minutes. She had never gotten the hang of long sauna sittings because she got very uncomfortable in the humid heat. Her heart began racing, her head started to feel like an over ripe, throbbing melon. When those likenesses came up, as they did now, they were always the cue telling her it was time to get some cool air and a shower.

On her way in to the estate she had been crowded at the gate by four half-running and chattering teenagers just as they were leaving. They had waved a greeting in a hearty but off-hand way and without really looking at her, which young people sometimes did to elders. She found it amazing that quite suddenly she had become invisible after having reached a certain age in her life. She philosophized that it probably had to do with the fact that her fertile age was beyond and past her. She smiled at the thought of the multitudes of animal instincts that still ruled Homo sapiens on such deep and purely instinctive levels. She was the one to turn to if there were troubles because of having survived to such an age, but within the chattering, swarming, sharing and comparing sphere of the young her position in the “flock” was quite insignificant. It was nice in a way. She’d had her

share of mingling, comparing and flirting.

The grounds keeper, Cita, gossiped to her about the group of youngsters coming from South America celebrating some finals or other. Apparently they had stayed for five days and had booked 18 months in advance.

“Such a nice incentive for them to look forward to Tenerife and to work hard at their education. And for us it is such a great review for the resort to have a magnifico reputation on the other side of the ocean for them to choose us. Visits such as that makes this work extra enjoyable, my friend.” Cita glowed with pride. She lived in the guest house on the grounds and Raisie had known her for decades. They had good chemistry and whenever Raisie came here to relax and swim, they always took the time to have a juice and a chat.

Cita’s family had been the owners of this villa for centuries and as an ancestor she had the first-hand privilege to choose if she wanted to live on the property. That she had chosen to work here in her later years of life was something that she had re-educated herself to be able to do. She and the previous caretakers had made the transition easily. Cita had lived here for decades before she’d decided to retrain herself from the restaurant trade and into this less stressful job. Cita always winked happily when she mentioned that it was so very comfortable to work this close to home.

They were sitting, prattling on about the youngsters, who apparently were studying to be archaeologists, and Cita was going on about the mess they had made in the rooms.

“One could think they had stayed here for a month, in these five days they managed to get the place so filthy! They were very nice and well behaved so I was surprised, you see. I’m going to have a field day writing up that bill – I can see another two nights covered for my magical Caribbean I’ve booked for next month. If they’ve got a room, ah, cabin for me, that is. I’ve documented every little thing I had to sanitize. I warned them but they only laughed, saying that they didn’t mind. ‘We’re just here to be Living la Vida Loca, Cita,’ they hooted, waving their hands in the air”. Cita vigorously demonstrated, “and then they just continued to samba late into the night, or really it was late into the morning. I’m thankful for my soundproofed bedroom!” Cita snickered,

shaking her head with a big smile shining in her eyes.

Raisie laughed – she could relate! Sometimes it was perfectly wonderful to just let all inhibitions go and just pay for the consequences. Arun and she did a lot of that in their day. Last year as a matter of fact. She told the story and Cita laughed hard at that while Raisie smiled a crooked smile. Then her phone rang. Her wrist tingled, she made the universal phone-call hand signal to Cita and rose, beginning to walk off, still smiling while saying:

“Hi! Raisie here! What? Why? ... Okay, I’m sitting down. What?! No! No. I’ll call you back!”

Within ten minutes she had walked out the gate.



She let the vehicle drive. She didn’t know if she’d gotten everything with her. She’d apologized to Cita, she couldn’t even remember if she’d looked her in the eye before she left, she’d just repeated:

“I’ve gotta go. Sorry. I’ve gotta go. Now,” and then she’d taken off. In her brain the same words kept looping: “This is not true! This can not be true. No way!” She told the car to veer off the road and onto a rocky shelf, getting herself off the main route and to a stop. She got out and called Arun.

“Where are you? Should I come back?”

“No, I’m sitting here with him right now. Wait, I’ll just get out of the room.” She heard a mumble in the background and recognized Simon’s voice. How could this be true? Arun raised his voice in a tone she never thought she’d ever heard him use before. “No! Of course I will not tell her anything from you! Do you even understand what I’m feeling right now? Just shut the fuck up!”

A door slammed and she heard Arun panting, brisk steps echoing and then she heard that he had stepped outside. Background noises of birds and children from his end filled her head. She let him collect himself. This situation was of course not routine to her, but the mindset of having to deal with a criminal was. It wasn’t to Arun. She waited for him to pick up the conversation. He breathed heavily, not from exertion but from stress. She could hear the difference. Her digi-voice said “Confirm Vid?” and Raisie confirmed with a twitch of her thumb. His face appeared before her. She hadn’t known what to expect but his furious grimace was definitely not it. The expression scared her. The face of a person she knew to be caring, sometimes to the destructive point of self-

obliteration, seemed about to commit violence.

“He’s been in our house! Hugged our children and our children’s children! He’s sat with us, been out late at night sharing our deepest thoughts and now, now, this! I will not go back in there. I’m afraid I’ll hurt him, Raisie!”

“Don’t go, then. Who is interrogating him?” She instinctively kept to a non-emotional but strict tone of voice based on experience of handling relatives and people in close relation to behavioral over-steppers. Arun’s voice trembled with rage as he answered.

“It’s Alik and Kai. They’ve been keeping a safe distance between us, Raisie. I just can’t do this. I can’t sit in there for a second longer. He’s fucking crazy! What a liar! He wants to talk to you. He says it can’t wait. I’m not going back in there!”

“Arun, please call Emica and then go to Laurs’ work place. Get a massage in the jacuzzi – that’s an order! You need to be surrounded by good things right now. This affects the whole family and I need you to get your focus and balance back. D’you hear me? Please! I need to call Kai and Alik on a secure line immediately. You need to text me to tell me you’re doing what I tell you, so I know you’re treating your state of shock.” She repeated. “You are in shock. I don’t know why they let you see him in the first place!” She let him hear her anger. She needed to rock his boat and make him focus on her instead of this unbelievable situation. Plus, she needed to be angry! His tone softened.

“He asked to see me. It was as if he needed to say he was sorry, the bastard prick! I’ll kill him! I didn’t know what to do and I got your message about going swimming so I wanted to let you recuperate.”

“Thank you, you beautiful man, and you won’t kill him because you will call Laur straight away. You need to take care of yourself. Focus! I’m staying here until you do. Call him now!”

She heard him say “Ring Laur,” heard Laur’s voice answering and Arun speaking.

“I’m coming over. Family emergency – I’m coming to your place.” Laur simply acknowledged and said:

“Hi, Mom. You okay?”

“I’m fine. No one’s hurt, darling. Just meet up with Dad. You’ll be needing each other. I’ll speak to you soon. I need to work. You’ll understand in a bit. And, don’t call Emica, please. Wait until we speak later. Okay? Take care of him.”

“Sure, Mom. Speak soon!”

Raisie disconnected and called work, listened to them explain and then she asked to speak to Simon. She thanked her lucky stars for the 18 hours of vacation and complete rest her brain had enjoyed, then Simon came on the holo-vid in front of her.

“You bastard! But thank you for coming clean. There are two things you need to answer me straight away. How long have you been out of active status and of what use can you be to us?”

THE ENDGAME

When the vehicle reached the destination, Raisie got out and stepped onto the gravel in the parking space. After having taken a couple of paces toward the cabin someone stepped out behind her, saying:

“Spread out your hands, Raisie. Right now!” She had heard and even used that phrase countless times before, ever since her first days in training for becoming a PDD officer. From the manner in which the order was spoken she realized that she could only obey.

“Be quiet and stand completely still. Please.” Same voice, same unwavering, commanding tone. Controlling her voice and hands her assailant tried to make sure she couldn’t launch a distress call or search order. She turned inward and began practicing her calming strategies, so as not to let either fear or fury bring her out of balance.

Another person stepped out from behind the cabin 15 meters in front of her, holding the hard

gloves which would hinder her from making Morse calls or trigger her sound receiver or microphone. She twitched her big and little toes in a rapid sequence which set off an alarm. Her tactical training set in and she began thinking straight. She realized that these people must be out of the loop because they didn't have intel on this latest tech. She was fitted with the gloves.

“Step away from the cabin. We have a vehicle parked on the other side of the ravine. We will walk there in silence, step inside, and then we will talk. Look straight ahead, please.”

The frustration of not seeing the person behind her and the danger she was in made her adrenalin and cortisol flow, which was a good thing. The eruptions of emotions were dulled by this concoction of substances produced in her own brain. Also her training at being methodical in controlling her instinctive reactions strengthened her ability to not give into the temptation to attempt escape or look back. She simply went into a following-orders mode.

They walked in silence, trudging carefully along a trail that went around the edge along this inner point of the ravine. It brought them across to the other side without having to climb any of the steep slopes on each side which would have been a feat which they definitely couldn't have managed without equipment. She took in the view, the sea with its broad shimmering band of sunlight, dotted with specks of recreational water sport boats and hovercraft. People down below fully engaged in enjoying themselves, without a clue of her predicament. But somewhere down there, her team was alerted. They would know something was amiss. The ten minutes it took for them to reach the designated spot was lined with hope for her future safety. Right now the danger she was in crawled imminent and raw on her insides.

The vehicle turned out to be what resembled a large mobile home. She could see that it was extremely and specifically fitted and her spirits sank like a heavy bolt running through her chest. This level of expense and planning meant that the thing would be sound-, movement- and radar-proofed. She would be invisible and silenced toward any surveillance. Probably. She had to keep her hope and motivation open for any possibilities to her advantage. This was an extremely dangerous situation and her training had taught her to stay acutely alert and have her mind readied

to any possibilities of making communication or an escape, all the while using her skills for negotiating.

The person who had gloved her opened the door, swinging his arm out in a welcoming gesture: “Step inside.”

Behind her, the person with the unchallengeable, decisive voice, whom she deduced as being in authority here, said in a terribly kind and smooth tone, the words she’d dreaded to hear:

“Do what you are told and we will not harm your family back home. Stay quiet for a little while longer. We just need a minute to get some equipment running. Sit, please.”

She sat and turned to, but couldn’t see through, the side window. This was not good. This was a terrible continuation of an already shit-storm day. Could Simon have known? No, he would have said something! Unless his whole defection was a ruse. She had to force herself to stop pursuing these lines of thought. It would distract her. Review negotiation training. Come on. Back on track.

The smooth-talker stepped out in front of her.

“You can speak now, we’ve shielded the vehicle. Hello, Raisie.” He smirked with thin lips at her, his eyes the color of cooled, unreflective, black lava. He eased himself down into the armchair in front of hers. It took a second to connect the first jolt of recognition with the second jolt of linking this face with being in imminent danger. His expression told her that he saw this reaction.

Wordlessly she understood him as he nodded admiringly at her ability to remain composed, holding her own. She actually felt her strength mounting at the repelling sight of this criminal. This was a meeting she instantly realized that she had hoped for for a very, very long time.

“You!” Her voice was deep, coming from a core source of power simmering in a layer beneath all others within her. There was a hunter’s tone in that single word. There was no training in the world that could have hindered her from revealing that impulsive reaction. He was a predator that it was necessary to lay down. A no-questions-asked killing in pure service of those she had sworn to protect when she had chosen her line of duty. There was an oath which she had trained and served her society by upholding, for decades upon decades now. It was to rid the world of the murderous

swines of the past and of which one was sitting here, right in front of her, right now. Not even two meters away! She roared again:

“Reinar! How the fuck did you get here?! How did you get anywhere? Why aren’t you whimpering in a secret bunker somewhere, you cowardly murderer?”

He laughed, or rather snickered, staring at her, feeling disgustingly pleased with himself.

“Oh, Raisie, this has been the endgame I’ve planned for at least fifteen years, my dear, though some changes have admittedly been forced upon me along the way. It’s an efficient world coverage you’ve set in motion within the PDD, I must say, dear. I’ve organized and set things in motion for this very moment since what seems like forever, young girl. My, you do have Lucia’s everything,” he looked her up and down, “and more, my dear. What fire! It is so nice to finally meet you.”

She leaned backwards taking him in, this infamous legend who no one had actually sighted for 20 years. She had known of the love Lucia had felt for him before she had known what he was, and sitting here, she absurdly realized that she had somehow come to regard this traitor of humankind as family. But he was no man. Seeing him and his play at aloofness, completely unscathed by the murders he had committed. Completely aligned with those beastly conditions of old, which were his highest desire to reimpose on his fellow humans. An evil and infantile mind not thinking twice about shedding blood, snuffing out lives and their worlds, to fulfill his perverse, gluttonous desires.

This kind of individual was what had kept the old system alive and kicking for so long. The complete disregard she knew that he had for other humans. The threat of depleting what Earth’s population needed to sustain the lives and futures of families, societies and whole regions was nothing of importance to the likes of him. As long as he had enough for himself and those he found useful. Here she was, closed off from outside reality, in the hands of this disconnected mind, a renowned terrorist, unable to act beyond his own desires, and she, horrifyingly enough, understood that her situation was extremely dangerous. But, she was useful for something, otherwise she wouldn’t be here. She couldn’t help but be intrigued.

Murderous bastard, sitting there smirking, she thought. And yet he was so familiar. An old family

friend. A romantic bond. She would use that. A sincere strategy to get under his psychopathic skin. The lack of empathy of this kind of personality was something that she was trained to handle, but he mustn't feel her complete lack of respect. He mustn't taste her complete revulsion toward him. She must keep him in charge without revealing his stupidity to him.

"So, you won't hurt our family? But how could you? Your terrorist cells are ruptured from within. You can't contact them, can you?" His smirk froze, and she quickly went on. "D'you know that we talk about you around the dinner table, now and again? You were a part of us once. Lucia has written a lot about you. Did you know that?"

He tilted his head as if he didn't know what she was driving at, but decided to play along:

"I guess she would. We were very close for many years. I could have been blood-related to you, you know? Or, rather, then it wouldn't exactly be you sitting here, would it?" His smirk was back. A good sign.

"I guess not, Reinar. Hopefully that person would carry a resemblance to Lucia, though." They smiled stiffly but felt a kind of rapport being built. She could see it in his eyes, and terribly enough feel it too.

"What do you want, Reinar? Did you hear of Angela and Ray or are you as completely in the dark as we are hoping you are these days?" She had to take the chance to make him feel powerful, even though her instinct was to completely castrate him, right here and right now. "We at the PDD are worried that something is going down, you see. Is that why you're here? To tell me something that I don't know?"

Now it was his turn to stretch himself against the backrest, into a laid back position. Her alertness was high. She used techniques to pump her adrenalin levels, painfully contracting invisible muscles, bringing up images of terrorist scenes, of child laborers, starving populations, bloody conflicts and screaming wounded, tensing and relaxing her mind. She saw every hair on his fingers, the chair's foam slightly reforming by swelling mere millimeters around his contour. She heard every whispering noise and all her senses were picking up in the racing, slow-motion stillness of a ticking

time-bomb. She heard the soft wet sound of his lips opening so as to let him speak.

“We are at our wits end. There will be no going back and I can’t speak for the other five of us, but me, I am not stupid. I can see that your cosy equity scheme has panned out. I’ve run out of steam but I do feel very angry about losing my power. Losing face. Being outsmarted by commoners really pisses me off, but the worst of it is you. People like you, who ought to be on this side of the fence. People like Lucia, who made us, well, truly, as I took it very personally, that she made *me*, look like a complete fool. The truth of that is, in hindsight, that I can see that she in fact always won the point when we discussed these matters. This is what makes my final stand so important. To me. I realize that the battle is lost, Raisie. No doubt about that. But I will not go down without showing you, and this wretched world of thriving peasants, my intent completely uncloaked.”

She hadn’t expected this. A hateful psychopath using self-reflective sincerity. She could see how her grandmother had been drawn to him. And, as he’d said, he wasn’t stupid. Her tone was less of a roar than of a sneak-hunting lioness’s now:

“So, you admit to having committed all these horrendous crimes during this past half century even though you knew that you would have no chance of winning your monetary rule over humanity back? This is what you’re telling me?” That well-practiced smirk again, and she was out of the chair before she knew it. Then, in a millisecond after that, she broke his nose. She somehow managed to redirect her open fist so that it made contact with his upper nasal bone, instead of shoving the whole nasal stem up into his brain. The blood gushed over her arm and his chest and trousers. The muscle boys pulled her off him, landing punches she didn’t feel in her face and ribs. The foot of the “boy” in front of her would have landed to break her leg at the knee if he had gotten the go ahead from Reinar, but instead he just shook his head, holding his nose. Smirking.

“Get some bandages instead, you fool. Top drawer,” he nodded making an instant grimace of pain at this slighter-than-slightest movement.

“Well,” he huffed, “you do come in a box of unexpected secrets. What hatred!”

She leaned toward him, ignoring the bolts of tearing pains that zigzagged through her nervous

system, and was immediately pulled back by the hair by the goon behind her, pressing her neck backwards against the backrest, with his goon face in her face, so she spat a thick yellow, bloody mess straight into his eye. Reinar laughed despite himself, and commanded his “boy” to stand down. She could see the agony every movement caused him.

“Will you be reporting yourself then?” Then he whispered. “If you get the chance, that is.”

“Reinar, you sickening excrement of sickness! You are the rotting rot of sickness! How deranged are you?” Silence ensued. They only stared at each other. Raisie could hear her blood pumping and feel her brain throbbing. Or maybe it was her scalp. She had to smile to herself, which made her smile even harder. She must look deranged herself. The guffaw just slipped her and Reinar peered through the slits of his eyes:

“So much of Lucia in you. If only things had been different.”

The muscle who had fetched the bandage cracked the nose into place without Reinar so much as flinching, his eyes not leaving hers, even to blink. He smiled through the blood and gore smearing his mouth and chin.

“Yes, well, you do come from same rotten lot, don’t you, Raisie? Why don’t I care for people, do you mean? Why would I care for anything that I don’t desire? I only yearned for having all those days of glory and glamour, which I had been groomed to believe that I would get to enjoy. The tingle of knowing the grand achievements I would put into motion every morning before I rose out of bed. The tingle of observing people around me constantly sucking up and chattering, always subconsciously nervous and afraid, knowing they might be discarded for “being obsolete”. How I relished looking through them while bleeding them dry.” He winked, pointing at his nose. “Karma, I suppose?” He became silent as the muscular servant began folding and then carefully placing the electronically pain reducing bandage which immediately began self-adjusting along the severely injured nose.

“It always seemed so ridiculous to me that the people around me gave importance to such mindless things as material luxury and appearance. Most of them were completely oblivious to the

consequences their chosen paths caused the world around them. It was a blast to watch, you know. Endless galas, charities and dinners packed with such confused and misdirected chatter boxes. Me, on the other hand, I was the cannibalistic spider in the web. I wanted something more sublime and got my best kicks out of calculating the moves I would then use my pawns to execute. I was very much aware of the consequences the people and Earth suffered because of how I enjoyed my life. Of course I was. Sexual pastimes were never really my kind of fun. Not as it seemed to be to many of my friends. I never got a rush from having flesh to play with. But, when it came to juggling ambitious people, oooh, that was my kind of release. The capturing of magnificent genius and then having the power to throw it out or drain it as I wished, without a second thought. That was my thing. Exhilarating!”

Raisie just looked at him. Hearing but not paying what he said any deeper attention. She knew the psychology of people like him. It was too unimportant to make any effort to listen to. Instead, she thought of herself having resorted to such uninhibited violence. She must indeed report herself when, because she was, getting out of this.

Her mind wandered. What did he want? To shine? To extort something? She would have to wait and see. Her reflex to kill him had exploded from horrific memories that had haunted her since her adolescence. It was an outburst which she would definitely have to get some counseling about. It was a violent instinct from an animalistic source deep within her, and she still enjoyed having done it to him. Immensely. Too much.

She reflected on her options. She had no idea why her abduction was being carried out. She decided that she had nothing to lose, and that honesty would be her greatest ally here, especially since he was such a scrutinizing individual. She had no doubt that he could read her very, very well. So, she began to tell him the truth that was throbbing in her heart at this very instant.

“Reinar, did you know that I was in training in India? This was about 45 years ago. One of the first raids I participated in was at one of your last remaining factories in the jungles up in the northwest. Do you remember those? We hopefully shut down the last of your terrorist camps and

production sites during a span of three years there. You might remember the assets you lost, but not the number of individuals, am I right? I mean there were so many people there, dying, captured, being born – how could you keep count of all of them. Am I right?” He just let those leaden, dull dark globes be focused on her face and said nothing. “But I do think that you would remember the types of people that slaved for you? Yes? The effort you’d put into hiding these last but so important work camps of yours must mean that you had thought the whole setup through quite thoroughly, right? I can’t understand why that kind of malnourished and slave-waged labor was so important to you. Was it simply what your kind of utopia looked like? Because that was the way you’d been raised to believe that it had to be, because it had always been like that before?” From her innermost emotional source she felt herself belonging within humanity and the sensation of being equally needed and important and valued filled her with an almost overwhelming strength. At the same time, a clearheaded disgust and righteous fury emerged toward this predator sitting in front of her. He said nothing, perhaps he tried to look smug, she saw the slits of his eyes narrowing slightly, but mostly he looked only pathetic, with the gory bandage smudging his earlier so exquisite exterior. She relished in the pain she knew he still felt and found herself having to hold her lust for causing him more in check.

“I entered the first room, actually against my team leader’s orders, you know, young and invincible as I thought I was. That room was packed with children. The air was filled with thick dust and fumes from ancient, loudly churning machines. We all had filters over our mouths, as did your overseers. Did you know that the latest makes of breathing masks in those days were nano equipped? You could get them at any pharmacy. Almost as developed as the ones you get today. But those children, the gray, skinny, sunken-eyed children, they had none. The dead silence of 60 children was the most unnatural environment I had ever been exposed to. Have you ever seen 60 seven- to ten-year-olds in one room ever being completely silent? Well, truthfully Reinar, it wasn’t completely silent. Some of them coughed while trying for their lives to silence themselves. I was hypnotized by big, darting eyes. Their whites and irises jumping in their terrified faces, searching

instinctively in the deepest of terror to detect if the overseers had seen them. I heard later that stains on the cloth they were handling in there would mean working without rations for a whole month. Working, starving, and under extra-penalizing scrutiny and punishment that whole time. Think how long 30 days is for an adult such as yourself in dire times. Imagine 30 days for a child?" She looked at him and saw that his eyes were actually shunning her face now. "Would you let your friends' children or my children, maybe Lucia's children, have worked there? Getting those 30 days? And not getting food? For coughing? If you even called it rations, but you would do that, of course, wouldn't you? Were you doing them a favor, maybe? Helping them to get by?"

His fists were clenching and unclenching now. Without him noticing, she hoped – who knew what such a manipulative and sick mind could perceive – she controlled her breath, filled her mind with real and invaluable events from her lifespan, bringing gratitude and respect for humanity into focus. She stared him down, letting her senses be filled with wonder, letting her intelligence put the perspective into place about this insignificant person. Properly redefining his role as a sole, irrational person among the billions of hard working, fun-searching and healthy people of this world. She looked back at him until he averted his gaze and they rode a while in silence. When she felt better centered she spoke again:

"Can I show you a film? Is that alright?" He had the audacity to smile then, nodding. She clearly saw that well practiced smile which had fooled any and all into thinking that he was a normal human being in the old days. The schooling he had received to be able to radiate "ambiability" when he was trained as a youngster. A smile that told you that he and what he stood for was as natural as it was acceptable. A smile that lied to you straight into the core.

She moved her fingers bringing up her gallery, followed by the words "BDRAY8 vid1". She opened it and the space between them was filled with a holo-vid of children hooting and joking, laughing towards them. Playing, bickering and screeching. Well-dressed, glowing and nourished kids.

"Do you see their amazement for living life? Are you capable of that? It's from Ray's eighth

birthday. There he is. The one in the blue shoes jumping on the bench. Today the children in your old enslaved area enjoy these kinds of afternoons. After school, during weekends and birthdays. All of them. Look – isn't that a beautiful day?" She told the holo to shut off and regarded Reinar.

"We are blooming into our fuller potential as a maturing species. You do realise this, of course?"

"Of course, Raisie. That's why we are here, you and I."

She couldn't help herself:

"What did you think about using those children and others that slaved for your lifestyle? I mean before people started changing their lifestyles? What did you really think about them? How did you live with yourself?"

"They were not relevant to me, Raisie. They were so many, all of them invisible and disposable. I guess you could truly say that I considered them as one would any cheap beast of burden. I've never been one to be plagued by empathy and such. Not enough to make a real change. Not all people were considered people, you see. Some were admired for being successful and others were considered not having that privilege, or simply not trying hard enough. Not many of my ilk ever were prone to long-sighted and durable changes for others, you know. It was not considered to be our problem. Even though today I can see that it might have been our problem. But no, I didn't know better and more truthfully it was a problem that all of humanity had created by keeping that system afloat. It all kept on running by humankind allowing people like me to steer the ship. In my early youth no one really cared enough. Everyone from high to low only bothered to see to their own affairs and keep busy by blaming anyone else. Until the responsible thing to do became integrated on an individual level, that is. That's when change came about."

Raisie just kept silent. He went on:

"Really, dear Raisie – those thousandth of a thousandth that were reached by our charitable get-togethers were only smokescreens. As were the wonderful hoaxes of playing on everyday people's bad conscience to make them believe they could make a difference and that it was their responsibility to contribute with their hard earned coins to save the oceans, wildlife and give people

access to fresh and clean water supplies. It was the most ludicrous scam and deterrence from bettering the world in real life that was ever, ever marketed!” He burst out laughing, actual smile-wrinkles formed charmingly around his handsomely tanned features. “And us with our donations! To better the world was in reality not what “being benevolent” or hosting charities was all about. It was all about feeling even more grandiose. To think if the historical behavioral science of today had been the theme of one of those sparkling evenings. Wouldn’t that have been a sight for sore eyes!”

That smile must hurt, she thought, as he went on, his eyes wildly amused.

“A benevolent charity, with tickets costing fortunes a piece, packed with the elite watching a PowerPoint tracing where all of their beautiful moneys had come from. Generations upon generations of psychos like me whipping human live-stock! What a gala!” He slapped his knees, his eyes watering, waving into the air, unable to speak for laughing so hard. He nodded at the bodyguard who had patched him up. He winked and rose, still chuckling.

“I’ll take a shower and change. Don’t hurt her. One of you stays right here and the other gets this car in motion. Let’s get this show on the road. Don’t hurt them now, will you, girl?”

Standing, ready to go, he paused, regarding her in silence. She saw a distanced and numbed predator mirrored in the timeless facial features. His sarcastic smile with lips drawn stiffly over strong, white, teeth and his body radiating a self-conscious posture which he used to beam an illusive aura of being a born leader. The image of a ruler pulsed about him. He turned and strode on seemingly without a care in the world and she could have sworn that the very air around his body parted ahead of him, as he swayed determinedly away from her.



Simran stood beside Arun, his posture stiff and his mind unbelieving. Behind the one-way window glass they stood watching Simon. Arun let Simran talk unhindered as the inevitable questions mixed in with despair surfaced. They had been there for the best part of 20 minutes. Laur hadn't arrived yet and Simran needed a friend so Arun had stayed by his side. When silence had taken over the little surveillance room for a long enough moment he rested a hand on Simran’s shoulder and asked:

“Are you ready to do this?”

The silent nod he received as an answer would have to suffice. They managed to take a deep breath simultaneously, a spontaneous and loud, long intake of air. This made Simran turn toward him so that Arun could finally make eye contact with the poor, broken soul beside him. There was strong agony in the look and surprisingly also warmth, which Arun felt came from their shared space of pain coming from knowing close family trauma. They gave each other a sad grin, shaking their heads, as Arun reached for the door handle. He squeezed it down while holding his gaze fastened in Simran’s despairing eyes. He whispered:

“Let’s go.”

Simon sat, unable to give Simran anything but a quick, terrified glance. He spoke almost at once, his words coming out in torn stutters as he expressed the fear he had felt for his child’s future and safety. He desperately tried to explain that this was why he hadn’t come clean before now. That he had wanted Simran to get a steady platform to stand on before he told this terrible truth which he had kept hidden. He told of his shame, of how he had been inactive for many years now. He expressed what sounded as a longing at facing a lifetime of repent and making amends. He stared down at the table the whole time. His tone changed as he went on to speak of the suspicions he had, but said that he didn’t want to talk about these specific matters in front of Simran.

“I will do everything to help because there is something going on. I will try to see if Angela will trust me. She hasn’t seen me in two decades and she can’t possibly know that my involvement has ceased. I can’t see how she could know. It would be strange if there had been word, because to my best knowledge, my cell has been completely silent for many years. You don’t have to stay for any more of this, Simran.” He made the first deliberate attempt at focused eye contact.

“I just wanted you to know that what I’ve done is unforgivable and that I’ve been frightened and confused about my priorities for as long as I can remember. When I thought I would protect you and ensure your future prosperity and safety, I mean even before you were born, I was actually betraying you. I was closing my mind to the truth of this new world bringing possibility to you and

all other children. I was satisfied with having a foot in both camps so that whichever way would win I hoped that you and I would be able to slip into that future unscathed. I let myself be lied to by very authoritative argument-mongers and I feared going against their belittling mockery and spiteful attitudes. I will do anything now to put my life into doing everything to help to better this, your, world. I am so sorry!” He cried in tearing rasps. Arun couldn’t believe it when Simran rose and went around the table, bending down to caress him.

“I know your heart. I know you are afraid of things, Dad. Please, help these people and then we will talk. We can talk for years, you and I. I will not abandon you, just like you never abandoned me. I understand your insecurity, but know that I do hate the things you’ve done. I am your child so I know your fears in my own fears of not being or having enough. I’ll see you soon. Don’t worry.”

“How can I not worry, child? You must hate me for lying to you, and more for having been an instrument of death to innocent people. All the documents I’ve revealed and processes of due justice that I’ve delayed through the years! I thought I was defending a future for you but I was only enabling these worst egoistical maniacs, including myself. Trampling on a murderous rampage only leading to the gain of a few. I thought we would be protected but I’ve only been enabling terror and causing seeping holes in this beautiful new world. In your beautiful world, Simran. How can you ever want to see me again?” His let out a soul wrenching cry and was suddenly, madly tearing at his ears, scratching, drawing blood on the sides of his face, gripping, clawing at his eyelids. Simran started backwards, shouting:

“No! No! Stop it Dad! You didn’t know better! Stop it! Arun!” Arun screamed with a force he never knew he had:

“HELP!!! We need help in here!” PDD handlers burst into the room, pushing aside the shocked youngster, pulling Simon’s hands and arms away from his face. Blood ran from deep grazes on his cheeks. The handlers somehow managed to fasten gloves on him which they then tethered to lines protruding from the side of the chair rests, but when they let him go Simon began thrashing and pounding his forehead on the table. They had to secure his chest with bands to the backrest. Simran

fell on his knees before him.

“Dad, please, please, calm down. I love you. I understand your fear – you come from a world where the old still had its grip on you and your parents. Please, Dad. Calm down. I won’t abandon you. This is not your fault – this is humanity’s inheritance. We learned about it in school. Do you remember when you helped me? The PTSD of Homo sapiens rules us by listening to fear and bowing down to strife. Do you remember? Fear of not having enough or being deprived of what you have? You are not alone at being afraid of stepping into this new world. Even my generation has doubts even though we’ve known nothing else. It’s in our thought-patterns, Dad. Please, please, please! Calm down! Daddy!” Tears flowed down Simran’s face.

Simon moaned and slowly began breathing in a more controlled way, although his breath still came in, gasps. Simran began stroking him on the blood-stained shirt across his chest and along his arms. Simon spoke with words that seemed to forcefully rip themselves out from his heart, determination and anguish shining through the blood on his face. Sincerity filling the thick, red drops dripping onto his shirt:

“I’m sorry. I really tried to keep myself from panicking, Simran. I’m so sorry. I lost it. Please, don’t remember me like this! For you I will try. I must get it together.” He visibly focused and deliberately drew calmer breaths. “I must help these people. I will do everything, Simran. Everything!”

“We’ll find a way through this Dad. You and I. Somewhere inside I’ve always known you’ve been hiding something, so this is a relief. Crazy as it sounds even to myself. But I can feel it now. Keep it together, Dad. There’s always been a numbness blocking your attempts at sincerity. A pain that has been buried but I’ve felt the ripples of your agony, disturbing the mound above it. I’m thankful to finally understand *what* you’ve been hiding, even though, yes, it’s much, much worse than I could have ever imagined.”

Simon’s face was distorted with anguish. But Simran leaned down and kissed him on the top of his head, then, turning swiftly, abruptly veering out of the room and never stopping to look back

while shouting:

“I love you! I really do!” The words were broken by sorrow, a door slammed and the youngster was gone. Arun gaped and mumbled, almost to himself:

“What a huge heart. Somewhere you gave Simran that strength, Simon. Somewhere. What an expression of love! I will stay here. But only for Simran. He’d better be honest from now on. There are no words for what I’ll do if you lie again, Simon. Do you hear me?” Arun spoke more to the universe than to the traitor in front of him. Simon only cried, inconsolably, until there were no more tears. Then he said, head hanging, staring at nothing in his lap:

“Bring Kai and Alik inside. We have work to do. I will give up everything I know. This is my only purpose from now on.” He obediently turned his face up toward the handler who began cleaning his face and treating the raw, self-inflicted wounds.



Reinar came back looking like a new person. The blood that had caked his face was gone, the bandage was washed clean and matched his skin tone. It had formed itself to his face both in shape and color. He was dressed in khaki with the explorer touch complete with the helmet and boots.

“You managed to land that one where it hurts, Raisie. Even these modern painkillers aren’t really managing to do their job properly. What would have become of you if you were left out in the wild with only other savages to compete with? I think you would do just fine.”

“Oh, shut up, Reinar! You really are a backward-striver, you know. This is the real world. Deal with it. To debate these things are not why we’re really here, I hope. You can’t be as daft as that, surely?” She laughed. “Setting this whole bad-boy thing together just to bump horns? Tell me that’s not the reason.”

“No, not really. But you see, I haven’t had anyone to talk this openly with for a long time. I have a few things I need to get off my chest. Especially since I feel a very strong bond with you. I hope you don’t mind. We do have a journey to kill. I’d rather not sit here in silence. Would you?” She shrugged, of course she was intrigued. She gave him a small nod and then watched as she waited for him to begin.

“Do you know that your ancestors, as well as mine, knew of climate change already in the late 1960’s? We knew but why should we be bothered? We would have survived – the yous and mes and our offspring. At least for a few generations. We put huge fortunes into dulling the information from sinking in properly into the consciousness of the masses. Before education and equity became such game-changers it was so easy being “us”. If only the path of the commoners’ loudmouthed protests, demonstrations and ‘righteous indignation’ had been continued – then we would have been a happy little circle of families still!”

He gave a short laugh not actually directed at her. She thought she could see how he was sunken into a past of that future’s hopes and dreams. She felt as if she had gotten a small doorway into the mind of a young and ambitious Reinara a century ago, his hopes molded in a pre-designated future. Today, people’s dreams were vastly richer with possibility and adventure. She had imagined that the privileged people of his past had been capable of much the same wonder at the prospects that life could hold, but she was quite startled by the sudden understanding that even he and her own ancestors had been very much locked into a system which actually offered a very closed route of how you could live your life. Her first reaction of revulsion at having to listen to this spiteful and petty criminal, suddenly verged on inspired interest. She leaned forward, wanting to understand every word he was saying.

“The changes in consumer habits and enlightenment concerning the impacts of personal transportation were genius moves. When the media began highlighting this and at the same time urging for natural resources to be converted into globalized property alongside strongly advocating for scientists to be freed and used to handle the effects of climate change – these were unquestionably pure genius tactics. It was frightening for my family but those were truly brilliant beginnings for this new world. We didn’t believe anything would come of it at first. Our well known short-sightedness was, in this field, what shot us in both feet at once.

“Then came the remaking of the economic and resource cycles in practical, doable outlines. Redefining the idea of wealth from monetary into life quality through freeing science and

personalizing education. Expansion without limits within researching and providing health care and learning methods. Reorganizing governments, oh, sorry, administrations, into planning for feeding, teaching, healing, transporting and housing its populations. A simple but enormous feat toward equity on a global scale. They were so infuriatingly well-prepared, Lucia and her lot.

“It was all too damn good. In the past, this system of yours was something you would waste your time reading about in sci-fi novels, but never realizing that humans had the absolute potential for implementing it in their own world, in the present tense. We should have killed the internet when we had the chance! All the support Lucia and her global crowd got was really all our fault.” He looked genuinely regretful. “The logic of intellectual resources being used to further the human race – of course it caused an unstoppable surge of support and initiative when it became clear that humanity could pull it off. We ought to have secluded the internet and taken the decrease in profits in time, but when we understood what the effects of free and of wide-spread knowledge cost us, enlightenment had already festered. The new world deprived me and yours of a delicious cake that we could both eat and have, over and over, all the time. Admit that you could have relished that. Having villas with the views, saunas and pools and even more extravagant things all over the world without having to book in advance – just admit it, Raisie. You were born to have that!”

She didn’t bite. She kept silent, still incredibly intrigued but the disgust welled up inside her at the thoughts that surfaced of the atrocities he had committed during the last century. To keep focused she deepened her mindfulness and refocused on the actual splendid world she was brought up in. It was difficult to keep calm. To think that he sat there being able to admit that this was a functioning world and to still have a profound wish for its end. How long had he seen that this was a functioning system? The nausea rose to her brain – what if he had known from the start? What if his mind was so perverted that he had understood the benefits for the enrichment and evolution of the human race and still opposed it? She couldn’t go there.

The side-window was opaque now but Raisie could only make an estimate of the general direction they were going in by the position of the sun. The forest and mountainous sceneries were

indistinguishable in their features for her to be able to work out exactly where they were heading. Her quite extensive knowledge of Tenerife was no use since they were hovering along an unmarked course and she had lost her exact geographical bearings. Raisie didn't even bother to ask where they were going. It wasn't of any acute interest to her. The vehicle whispered on in silence and she wondered where her track team would be at this point. They would have spotted what was going on through having scrutinized satellite footage. Reinard would have been pinpointed as being on the island, and they would know what he was capable of and therefore keep a very safe distance so as not to endanger her life. They would wait for her next command which would have to be when she was allowed outside again.

Unfortunately this wagon was built with the latest camouflage tech. She recollected a report of the theft of five wagons of this model two, maybe three, years back. It moved like a worm through the pines. She could make out the graphene hull shape-shifting as it moved forward by slipping, squirming and ducking as it made its way smoothly, without hesitant swerves through the landscape. It eerily gave her a feeling of conscious determination from the machine. This way there would be no detection from hikers or meeting traffic – its sensory equipment would make sure of that. A vehicle that was the typical product of her time but which, in this now, didn't serve any fortuitous purpose.

She was very satisfied to know that he and his Reactionists had been out of the loop for too long to know of the latest technological developments within communicational tools. She smiled in spite of herself. This meant that terrorists world-wide weren't able to recruit new, modern world talents as they had before. It also meant that people, within all areas of expertise, were satisfied to keep existing in the free world. He *was* a remnant of the past. No longer considered useful, beneficial or a bringer of hope. Obsolete to the advancement of Homo sapiens. She loved it! She simply loved it!



Emica had picked up the children. Tinnie and Smill were a handful at best. She had brought Kelby, the puppy, to make it easier for her to lure them into a compliant state, while walking with her from the daycare center. Although she loved them dearly, the “children thing” was not her forte,

so she had learned to make the task easier by using puppy bribery. Yes, she had her smarts about her. With her feeling very clever and getting the children to do exactly what she told them to do, they made their way toward the LD. She had to get some research stuff to complete her packing. She was blissed out – they had said yes! She made a spontaneous skip in the meadow’s tall grass. The board had been shaking their heads at her exhilaration at the same time as they told her their decision, but it was definitely a yes! She whooped out loud, turning Kelby’s and the kids’ heads. She made ushering hand movements and they scooted along. They’d said YES!

“There will be eyes on you because you’re not on Greenland in a working or studying capacity. You have filled your quota of input duty this year, so these months will be strictly recreational and observational. Even the latter to a very modest degree. We know that workaholism is a trait of yours and your dedication is wonderful, but to be able to keep a rich life, you are hereby ordered to Have Fun!” The spokesperson pointed two index fingers at her and everyone had laughed, even she. Though she really *had* wanted to have been allowed a least some professional hours. Well, she wasn’t going to let that irritating fly in the ointment be what ruined her stay and she *was* going to bring some reading. No one had said anything about reading. She would listen and learn and, following orders, enjoy herself. Polar bears! To think she would see polar bears. No one could be in Greenland for three months and not see polar bears. Oooh – she couldn’t contain herself.

A loud, frantic plinging followed by hoots and shrieks awoke her to realizing that the children had strayed from the meadow and out onto a bike path. Kelby began barking, or rather yelping, and a woman in a bright pink helmet was holding her askewly leaning bike with one hand while wildly shaking her other arm at Emica:

“What are you doing!? These kids are too little to become tarmac fill! Come on young’un! What were you thinking!?”

“Well, of Greenland, if you must know.” She smiled broadly, and the bicyclist just shook her head. There were always a lot of people shaking their heads in Emica’s life.

“Be careful of the little’uns. You gotta get your head out of the clouds watching tornados like

these three. It could have ended badly, you know. Lucky for you I was alert!” Emica let the seriousness of the situation register, called them to her, lifting Kelby from the ground as a prize, which sent them hooting toward her. She nodded a good-bye and called a “Thank you” and “I’ll do better,” after the strict but kind and, thankfully, alert person.

“Wow, kids, I’m sorry. I should have watched you better. It’s dangerous with bikes, d’you know, and I should’ve been looking out for you. Come on, let’s keep ourselves among the flowers and insects, shall we?” The children went on, nodding and continued their endless exploration, the puppy scurrying after them at the end of his long leash, and her being much more vigilant. In this way they slowly made their way into the entrance hall of the LD.

She decided to take them with her down into the archives. The scare she had gotten and the good effort the kids had made at keeping to the meadow all the way here was a good reason for letting them have such an adventurous treat. The murky, ill-lit corridors of the basement would make it their big adventure of the day. And down there she could let Kelby run off the leash for a while as she gathered and copied what she needed. Everyone happy.

Emica had learned from her mistakes in the past so she pressed Tinnie’s and Smill’s index fingers together with her own and in unison the three of them pushed the -2 button.

“Yay!” she exclaimed receiving the latest look of disdain, clearly saying, in unison, “What a baby!” from the little scamps. How she loved them! She would truly miss them a lot. Maybe they could all come visit! A mischievous grin spread in her mind. Oh, yes – she was going to nag the family into agreeing to that.

She knew exactly where to go. Fifth door to the left. There were several lights to turn on along the way and she couldn’t keep the little scoundrels in check so they fought over the who would and the who had about pressing the lighting buttons accompanied by Kelby jumping and helping them fill the cemented walk way to the limit with echoing noise. Her shouting:

“Come on, kids!” was all but drowned in the clamor.

Reaching and then closing the fifth door behind them, she turned on the light switch and made her

way down the aisles. Here the kids couldn't cause any damage. Everything was secured in metal boxes which could only be opened by an authorized person's thumb prints. Now that Tinnie and Smill could have an afternoons free scoundreling, they of course deemed her the center of every attention.

"What's that? How's that work? Can I try?" Endlessly. She sent them on a wild goose chase looking for water. "Call me when you've found some," she said, pointing at her wrist, which made Smill say:

"Call 'Mica", at which nothing happened.

"You'll have to say my whole name – Emica – okay. Try again."

"Eemica", and the tingle in her wrist confirmed success.

"Roger that", she said and Smill's and Tinnie's giggles filled her head inside and out. "Come on you little scoundrels, go see if you can find any water down here. I don't think there is any but you can try, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, aunty 'Mica," their voices echoed because she'd forgotten to end Smill's call. She twitched her off-switch finger as off they went, Kelby jumping at their heels.

She was done collecting what she had set out to and was making her way to the machine that was copying every document she had laid eyes on. She liked to have paper copies. It was a thing she had. Reading everything on screen was something she found tiring and not as inspirational. She also loved to scribble with physical pens. To each their own, as they said.

Turning a corner, she stopped dead in her tracks. The children were sitting on the floor in front of two boxes, each about a soda crate's size. She saw the timer and immediately registered that it was counting down. 02:37:14, 02:37:13, 02:37:12.

"Come away, children. Right now!" The little ones heard the urgency in the grown-up tone of voice and scurried to her side at once. Kelby approached more cautiously and sat down. Emica stared unwaveringly at the device as she hooked him to the leash. She began backing away and an automated recording emerged from speakers somewhere inside the crates.

“You cannot move more than twenty meters away from here or this device will detonate.

Detonation will then occur before the timer has finished its’ countdown. There is time to make a distress call but do not flee.”

The horror flooded in wave-like, icy surges through her. She managed to maintain control so that she didn’t wet herself, but it was close. This was horror. This was not happening. The message was clear and she instinctively dialed the distress signal. The words echoed within her in the voice she knew so well. No. Please, please, no, you haven’t done this! How could you?



“Did you know that I almost proposed to her once? It was an evening to remember.” Raisie could almost see a thin film of memories moving him from the present and into a time that lit something in his eyes. If it was hope or spite she just couldn’t say. “We’d been out with friends until late. This was just when she had moved out from the mansion. I had imagined that she would be very distraught over this. I know that I was. I thought everyone in our situation suffered the same agony from being bereft of our own properties. So much property having been harnessed for the “greater good”.” He spat the last few words out shooting her a quick glance. “Yes, I know that I had a form of choice in the whole thing. I might almost have been able to live the varied geographical life which I was accustomed to as I have priority to book rooms or parts of houses for longer periods of time than others because I had owned them. But that is just the crux isn’t it! I had to book what was previously mine!!! It wasn’t the same when I couldn’t move exactly wherever I pleased and precisely *when* I pleased!”

She almost felt sorry for the old man. Had he really believed that he exclusively had deserved the right to have such choices even though people all over the world worked at least as hard, and mostly much harder, than he did? The logic of this often passed people like him by. What a stumped perspective! She realised that he had been bereft of a modern upbringing. Being without the values of sharing and enjoying the moment, of freely experiencing the planet around you, *your* planet of birth. The prison of his perspective brought on an insight into how confined his mind must be. The realisation stunned her.

This belief in exclusivity actually brought on extreme exclusion. The old world must have caged the mind of a person like him, as much as it had done those who were monetarily dependent. Material hoarding having been the definition of freedom back then, most people on either side of the old fence had believed in the misconception of exclusivity and hierarchy concerning access to food, schooling and housing as “being the way it was meant to be”, regardless of how hard a person actually worked. Then the current and mature definition of freedom and “being rich” had begun surfacing, and after that the redefinition process of what a good life meant had almost kick-started itself. Having a wealthy and rich life meant having an inspiring time while educating yourself, working with what made you the greatest person you could be, having free time to savor and the possibility to engage in your favorite pastimes and enjoying your social, or non-social life and having the opportunity and material possibility to make all those happen.

She remembered Lucia’s notes on the matter.

“It is humanity’s biggest eureka-moment ever,” she wrote. “The internet is wild with discussions on “true wealth” and the logic of it all always comes out on top.” Raisie surprised herself at feeling a small smile on her face at the recollection of those words. Inclusion versus exclusion. The math of the prisoned minds of the past, on both sides of the monetary fence, really did itself. Hoarders versus strivers and no one with true personal freedom or a rich life in the true essence of what that meant.

She could understand the drive to seclude oneself from others and hoard and brush away the good of the society around you. A mental carry-over from when most Homo sapiens lived under daily pressing threats from predators and during a more primitive dependency on circumstances for survival. Growing out of instinctively being on the defensive to protect the material things that sustained you would be a long process which humanity had only just embarked on. The effect on the human race, the day-to-day gains that these mere baby steps of co-operation and mutually sustaining social structures had already taken humanity toward, in the perspective of one race living in equity, has evidently made a significant part of humanity’s core excluding barrier progressively

crumble, she thought. In the logic of that light, an excluding system is only destructive and no longer useful to modern human beings.

His voice awoke her from these well-needed, mindful reflections. She kept flexing and tightening muscles to keep adrenaline in a constant, high flow. These actions of activating mind and body kept her alert and focused.

“Anyway, we walked, just the two of us, after we had eaten and sat down on a bench in the park right next to her new high-rise home. She pointed with pure joy up at the windows and balcony that were hers, leaning toward me to let me follow the exact angle of her arm to make sure I could see it. I heard that she was genuinely happy and instead of asking straight out as I had planned I suddenly realized that she never complained about these changes that were happening. I hadn’t met her in a couple of years and I didn’t know what she had been working on. I had no idea but got a queasy feeling in the pit of my gut right then. We talked about some old memories and then she asked me what I thought about the new administration of the U.N. This was when they increased the representatives 30 times, from 200 to 6000, and the committees under them were multiplied by one hundred.” He looked at her to see if she was following. She nodded, seeing that he seemed to be aging by the minute.

“She told me then that she was on the founding board and that they needed people like me to help organize the quality and structure of industrial management on a global scale. “We’re working closely with several people who have been at your level of management, you see. As it is now we have to increase administration and executive roles within production areas so that many people with the proper skills can share the work between them and train others at the same time. Every individual with your skillset is a most crucial asset.” I remember losing my ability to speak. It was a kick in the gut, a thousand times worse than the punch you landed, young lady. The fury I felt at her rejection, not only to the proposal she never had known to be coming, but of our whole way of life, of our ancestors’ hard work and strife. A betrayal beyond anything I had ever been subjected to.” He fell silent. Tears welled up and he bit his lips together, regaining composure.

“If,” he breathed deeply, “if I had been able to keep my wits about me I would have kept a straight face, but my world was crumbling around me, Raisie. But, for the sake of it, let’s say if I’d managed to compose myself, then I could have joined in, learning in silence everything I needed to bring this whole madness to it’s begging knees and then maybe, maybe, we could have ruptured this whole shitty reformation before it took root. I’ve thought a lot about that through the years, you know.” He actually gave her a crooked smile through the filter of memories that were separating him from the real now. “But, lately, I’ve understood that even then it had been too late. Anyway, I lost it. I told her exactly what I thought of her treacherous thinking and acts of soiling our heritage. I told her I hated everything she stood for and that all this would go to hell and then she could come back to me. I screamed and the toil of all the things being ripped from me just broke me that night. That beautiful night, when I had a dream. A dream of us and our future children retaking what had been stolen from us. The lifestyle that wasn’t just any-fucking-body’s to have, for crying out loud! Madness. Utter madness!”

He fell silent. The years just seemed to be pulled out of him. The skin sank into the cheekbones, his fingers were bones with skin tightening over swollen knuckles, his eyes peeking from deep, dark sockets.

Raisie surprised herself by speaking in a soft voice:

“What am I here for Reinar? Why do you need me here?”

He answered in kind:

“You will be by my side. You will be there when I show the world just how benevolent I can be. We will soon be there, little one. This will be glorious. My last stand. This will be grand!”



Angela slumped back in the living room chair, her eyes downcast, shamefully fooled, mad as hell and, oh, so tired. Simon had entered her “quarters” ten minutes earlier. He’d been alone. She recognized him immediately. He’d looked sketchy, just as she remembered him, and her hopes had gotten the better of her. As they shook hands and the identifying marker in the groove between her index finger and thumb colored the skin in a quick flash of burgundy, she believed that he was still

in the movement. She'd needed him to be in the movement and hung on his every word:

"I've scrambled the censors, Angela. I've been out of the loop for a year – what's going on? Do you need anything from me? We'll have to be quick about this – I don't know how long we'll have!"

It was as if a light was turned on inside her and she felt the dullness she had experienced before he'd entered just be whisked out of her. Relishing in the sudden clear-headedness she'd eagerly and concisely told him all:

"We've placed wi-fi roasters all across the region on Reinar's orders. You know the hot spots. They haven't changed in decades, at least as far as we know. I've been on it for two months. They'll activate whenever he needs them to. I don't have any other information than that. Hey, what happened to your face?" She looked closer and saw small drops of blood seeping through what looked like heavily applied concealer.

"Oh, that. I fell off my bike getting over here. Had a skirmish with some bushes. I'd only just learned they'd gotten you locked up and wasn't looking where I went. Don't worry about it. Anyway, what about Ray – how is he involved? Does he need anything, d'you think?" His light smile with eyes slightly widened had tricked her completely. Textbook stuff. Unblinking she ranted on:

"No, he's been under the influence of drugs too long to be relied on. With alcohol and other drugs almost non-existent today and my beautiful Ray had to get addicted. I just don't understand it. He has so much to live for, you know. He's been lashing out, being irrational, moody and going through with impulsive actions without prior orders. Gone rogue, would you call it that?" She'd peered guiltily at Simon. "I lost control over the boy. I'm so ashamed! Will we be moved out of here? I don't know what the wi-fi roasters will trigger and I'm scared it might harm the boy. I gave up on the rest of the family a long time ago, a bunch of traitors, the lot of them. But him, I need to protect him, you see."

Simon had turned and nodded toward the door cam and in burst Arun with what she was told were

two bomb experts, Shraga and Nura, from PDD Special Forces. The latter were dressed in uniforms. Angela's eyes bulged, she toppled to her left and Simon instinctively reached out for her. In an instant she was scratching all over his face with her sharply filed, claw-like fingernails ripping at his skinless sores, fists of sharp knuckles pounding and tearing at his neck. He just stood there, holding her, unflinching and taking it as if he was unable to move. When Shraga lifted her up by the waist, away from Simon's torn-up head, Nura bending her fingers out of his hair she shrieked, madly flailing her arms and legs trying to reach him.

"How could you betray me? You know what the cause would bestow on you and your precious Simran." Every word out of her mouth reeked with the disgust she felt. "You are the worst of the worst! You can all leave now – I am not playing at your little commie kindergarten anymore. You will bring humanity to its end, you crazy do-gooders. Get out of here! Get away from me! Let me go!" Abruptly, Arun's hand landed with a loud bang on the coffee table in front of her. A tea cup flew off, sailing into the air, spilling a hot fountain, crackling to a thousand pieces on the wooden floor. Her voice brokenly squeaked in Simon's general direction:

"How could you?!"



Shraga brought up the feed which Emica was transmitting and showed the screen to the elderly terrorist. The device in the archives, closing up on the digital counter, the boxes it rested on, the lens swinging around to show her the children playing with a little dog. Angela's face falling told them what they needed to know.

"This isn't your doing?" Arun had to take in the facts but the tremendous power of what he realized floored him. His knees folded and his chest felt like it imploded. He crashed down onto the sofa behind him. This meant that his son, his Ray, had planted the bomb in Emica's and his work place. Her brother, his son, wanted to kill them. Or at least he didn't care if he did. He turned on every technique he had ever drilled himself in for displacing himself from this realization. Even Angela shied away from his stare which was oozing with pure hatred.

"You did this, you envious, begrudging bitch! You know that, don't you? What the hell were you

thinking? Is it so hard to be without your protected little nanny-pacifier-world that you had to poison a child with your hierarchical bullshit, you irresponsible brat? You will face up to this. Look at your grandchild, you cowardly, useless little shit. You'd better get Ray to set this straight, you hear me?" He tried to get out of the sofa but his muscles were not obeying. Shraga and Nura rushed forward and kept him down. Angela's lower lip quivered which fired Arun up to just keep on squalling at her:

"How can you not want all children to get to live in a world like this? You egotistical brain wash of an idiot!" Nura interrupted his outbursts:

"This is not the time! We don't have the time!" Arun's attempts to rise just ebbed out of him, his body convulsing as he resigned into speechlessness, cramped sounds telling of his pain-racked sorrow.

Nura began speaking to them all, but put her face close to Arun's:

"We have to go, now. Angela, you will do your best to talk Ray into cooperating. Won't you?"

The frail little woman shrieked:

"Yes, of course. Of course I will!" She was deeply frightened and Arun registered this. In a microsecond, he closed his eyes, making his body relax and redirected his emotions into the place deepest within, where only rational, pure love resides.

"Okay. I'm going to be able to handle this. I won't jump her. And, I won't explode in front of Ray – I do understand the danger of the situation. I'll keep calm and let you do your jobs."

Nura and Shraga searched his face and body posture, then they nodded at each other, more than to him, confirming that they saw the same thing. They let go of his shoulders. Shraga spoke:

"Okay, everybody. Keep it cool. Only say or do anything if one of us gives you a nod or a word or a sign. Is that clear?" Everyone nodded in unison. "This is a deadly serious crisis and you will not jeopardize other people's lives. None of you! Are you listening Angela? Not one of you will endanger any other person's life here or we *will* knock you out. Understood?" Angela nodded, her aristocratic beak made her head resemble a wide-eyed, frantically pecking woodpecker, and fear

and tears showed, telling of her sincerity. Everyone seemed to be in line.

Swiftly, they moved Angela with them into Ray's rooms. Not even seven minutes had passed since Simon had gone in to meet Angela. Efficiency was of the essence. The LD was being evacuated in haste.

Ray was visibly taken aback at the burst of the crowd invading his space, instinctively scrambling into the far corner of the living room. Handlers coerced him to come forward and he was shown the feed of the LD being emptied of people. Ray's intended targets moving en masse away from the bomb site. Acting upon the explicit instructions given him by Kai and Alik during the seconds en route to Ray's quarters, Arun authoritatively approached his son.



Ray's eyes wouldn't register what he saw at first. He glared at Angela, whose face was drained of all color and looked twice as old as yesterday morning. His father bellowed:

"Your Tinnie is down there. Look! You will help us. You will save your child. Right now!" Arun took him by the collar and dragged him out into the hallway and onwards with unexpected strength, as if he had the power of several well trained people.

Ray screeched:

"How can Tinnie be there? How is it even remotely possible that *my child* is *there*? This is a ploy! You're trying to get me to defer from my mission! Granma – how could you change sides? How could you!? You're freegin' lying to me!"

His father jerked his face toward his own and hissed:

"You will just shut your usual 'holier-than-thou-fuck' up and diffuse that device. You are not killing anyone here today! Are you listening, Ray? Not a n y o n e!" In under one minute they were all in and out of his cell. Angela was left behind with a handler and Ray could hear her whimpering behind them.

Still being dragged, he flew along like a dry leaf behind his fifteen-centimeter-taller father. Ray still being pulled by the collar, they all stormed out to cross the meadow, taking the short cut along the path of rainbow-colored tiles cutting straight through to the LD building on the other side. They

could see people fleeing out of the high-rise, streams of a seemingly flowing crowd, moving fast to try to get out of harm's way.

Ray was young and despite his addiction he was very fit, but he didn't even try to pull himself loose. This had to be road's end. He fell inside. He fell through all bottoms at the thought of Tinnie. In these chaotic seconds he'd had to recognize his unspoken wish for his child to have a future. It was as if he had fought trying to bury this aching longing for his child, but instead of softening him it had hardened him and now, with all this madly crashing down, his shell cracked as easily as if it were crafted from the brittlest crystal. Anyone else could die. Everyone, for all he bloody cared, but not his only child. How could this have happened? How could Tinnie be in harm's way?!

"How could the fuck could Tinnie be there?" He screamed at the people around him. Spit flying. "How? Did you put Tinnie there, you mind-wipes? You are the holier than thou! You destroyed my life! Did you put Tinnie there? How could you do that!?! " He howled, a sound escaping from a deadly wounded beast.

This was not fair! He'd wanted for them all to die and now he had to save them. He vomited as he was rushed along, retching, spewing sour acid into the tall growth. They would lock him down for life for this and now, he had to friggin' save them all!



The children cowered together. They felt her terror, she could see it in their little faces. She had really tried to be mature, to keep a straight face, but when she looked at them and heard their frenzied, up-winding and urging questions she hadn't been able to calm them anymore. She spoke to Arun:

"You have to get down here, right now Dad! This is not something I can handle!" Trying to smile, while shooting darting glances at the kids who had turned silent now - even worse - and were just staring back at her.

"We're on our way through the entrance now, darling. Three minutes, max. Ray is with us. We'll be down in a jiffy."

She began to cry. She couldn't stop herself. This was not happening. She looked at the children

and seeing her tears they came scrambling towards her, kissing her on the cheeks, patting her hair and repeating what they had learned would help when you were sad.

“It’s not your fault.” “You didn’t do anything.” “There, there.” “Please, Auntie’Mica,” Despite herself, she smiled at their love and at how they put her name into a one word. “You’re so nice, Auntie’Mica – we love you – right Smill? We do, don’t we?!” “Oh, yes ’Mica’s sooo nice! We’ll help you!” She hugged them close and they shared little words, and yelps, scooping up little Kelby into the cuddle.

The longest couple of minutes finally brought their saviors through the door. Ray, Simon and two people introduced as Shraga and Nura, entered. The latter set up a barrier of electronic bars just inside the doorway so that no one could rush out and, Emica suspected, to protect them from anything being thrown, or blasted, through from their side of the archive. Arun and two people she didn’t know stayed outside.

Arun said: “Shraga and Nura have ordered us to stay outside the threshold, but we can stand right here and talk for a bit. Then we’ll have to close the door and you brave kids will stay inside with Emica and these four nice people. You know Simon, don’t you?” He smiled at the kids who nodded, but both were obviously still very rattled.

“Can we leave? Can we? Please, R...,” Emica realized in time that she couldn’t say his name, not in front of Tinnie. Ray didn’t look at Emica but kept staring at Tinnie, who of course didn’t recognize him. He answered:

“You can’t leave here. No one who has come this close to it can. It has “smelled” us. We have to stay.”

He tore his eyes away and followed obediently when Shraga took a soft hold of his arm, whispering:

“Let’s do this.” They crouched down in front of the bomb and began taking it apart.

“I don’t know if this will work. I’m going to do my best.” Emica could hear that he was being truthful. And she lost her footing, collapsing on the floor beside the little ones.

The children started crying, rushing for the doorway shouting for Arun, Mommy and wanting to go home! Simon managed to catch both children by their shirts.

“We have to stay a little bit longer, you two. Come on, let’s look after Kelby. He’s worried too, you know. Let’s help him have some fun!” Simon threw the dog’s ball. “Come on, kids – I’ll catch him before you do! Kelby – fetch!” The suddenness of Simon’s distracting outburst caught them off guard and soon there was a loud and wild game afoot further down in the corridors while Ray, Shraga and Nura were hovering and whispering to each other, kneeling beside the bomb they were disassembling. Emica was still crying. She had crawled to sit on the floor near the barrier. Arun was crouching by her on the other side. Greenland, kids and puppies, joy, abundance and freedom – all of that seemed completely unreal. Things as unfathomable as the size of the universe. The world was polluted and disintegrated. Her brother was a murderer and, she could hardly think it, but she had realized that she had been among his intended prey.



Ray sweated. The plans were up in holo in front of him. He held the pincers in one hand while screwing with the miniature, f-ing screwdriver with the other. He had to manage this. Shraga had the important task of wiping his forehead. At every move his sight had to be clear - drops of salty fluids dripping into the bomb could simply not happen! The seconds felt like years. Thankfully he had medicated as he should and his shakes were almost non-existent. Nura helped him as soon as he said the word and they were making good progress.

“Soon done,” he said. “I’ll need a moment to gather my thoughts on the next step.” As if on cue, Shraga immediately turned and walked away, picking up on the conversation with PDD head quarters while stepping soundlessly away, securing what he said from the prying ears of children.

“He says it’s only the one. We don’t know, but I believe that he can disarm it. Everything he does is in accordance with the blueprint he showed us... Yes, he had it on an encrypted file. It wasn’t detected because it looked like a vid of his kid. It was coded into a single frame of a swinging sequence. Very advanced, he boasted, so I’m not sure if he had those capabilities himself but he says he’d gotten it a decade back from someone at an area meeting and had saved it until now.

You'll have to get it out of him later. We have to be sure. Are you in place outside? Okay, see you soon and you can have him. What a shitty mess. Gotta go."

He was met by Shraga holding Ray, coming round a corner.

"It's done. It's stopped "ticking". Let's leave. Children! Everybody! Time to go!"

Everyone assembled by the door. Deep breaths sounded and then the barrier was shut off and they were still there. It was done!

"Okay! Go!" The kids were pushed out ahead of everyone else. Next, puppy in the arms of Emica, and then the rest followed and they all stampeded, somehow in an orderly fashion. Rescue personnel were on hand, two to one, even Kelby got his own vet rescue, though he yelped and wriggled, trying to get back to his flock.

Ray was exited through a back door, escorted and heavily restrained by Kai and Alik. No one looked for him. He had disconnected himself completely now.



Reinar tilted his head at her.

"We will soon be where I want us to be, my dear. Maybe you'll soon recognize the surroundings?"

She looked out, but there wasn't anything familiar yet. The sun was very low and it would only be another couple of hours before sunset. Then she suddenly saw where she was.

"Why are we here? What are you going to do?"

"In good time, Raisie, dear. In good time."

They veered as close to the El Lance lookout point as possible and when the vehicle had come to a standstill he gestured for her to get up. First out the door was the taller of the mercenaries. He held a weapon high in the air and she heard people screaming. Her fury erupted again but the other man was holding her arms tightly behind her back.

"You aren't going to hurt people, are you, Reinar? That's not the way you want to be remembered, is it?" She couldn't know for sure but her gut feeling told her that bloodshed wasn't his plan at this point. With this unveiled appearance he must know that this would be his last

Reactionist statement.

“No, you’re right. We are not here to kill innocent bystanders. Definitely not. Come with me and stay flexible. Just do what you’re told, please.”

Now Raisie saw two more people getting out of the front seating area. They were carrying huge cases and hoisted them along the now empty space around them and started up the little gravel path up ahead. All five of them were now making their way up to the opening at the front of the lookout point.

There were more tourists here than she had ever seen at this historical site before. She registered that many of them were focused on the place’s VR experience, but soon the murmurs of those who registered this unusual and armed group stirred even those people to look out to see what was going on. People would be people, and despite the weapons a lot of people had stayed, keeping a distance but to Raisie any distance, within sight was too close. Reinard seemed to want them there for some reason because he or his entourage didn’t usher them off. Everything was happening too quickly. Her teams would have pinpointed them right about now. It wasn’t two minutes since they had stopped and now they were already standing on the edge looking out across the sun-rippled Atlantic. She felt she had to take charge, to warn people to get away, but Reinard had his eyes peeled on her and when he saw her drawing breath to speak he leaned in at once, a few centimeters short of her face, just enough for her not to be able to head butt him. He signed with fingers on lips, sounding a drawn out:

“Shhhhhhh.” He smiled, swept his sight with one calculated sweep, taking in the whole crowd’s undivided attention and then, giving a small nod toward the onlookers, he suggestively hissed:

“For everyone’s sake, Raisie, hold your tongue.”

He waved his hand at his people and human activity literally exploded on the cliff’s edge. Cameras, lights and microphones were unpacked and mounted in scarcely more than three minutes. Then the crew did a thorough but professional overview, followed by a curt nod and the universal sign for “Okay”. These were incredibly well-prepared and efficient people.

“So, here we go, Raisie. Thank you for complying. You don’t have to be afraid for your safety. No harm will come to you. Afterwards you may want to call your family. I understand that there are some dramatic events going on in your little part of the world, of which I can assure you I have been completely unaware. The universe seems to want to align some completely historical events on this day. All the better for us getting noticed, my dear. All the better. And please, tell your people to stand down or there might be unnecessary complications. Someone might get hurt.” She followed his gaze and saw several PDD officers having grouped in front of the crowd. “And let’s get started, people. We need this audience.”

Raisie’s personal goon dragged her up beside the old man, and they made their way to the edge where they came to a standstill beside the statue of the old Guanche king, Bentor. The last of the Guanche kings.

Reinar spoke, beginning with simple greetings into the microphone, and when he received a signal from the two-person sound and camera crew, he began:

“Today, I stand before you, one of the last surviving true leaders of the old world. The world which none of you today have ever been ruled by or are in the least interested in reinstating. I can understand that. What I and my kind brought to this world was grandeur, but it was grandeur to the few. In the light of your world, this world, even I have had to fold before a new understanding of the factual meaning of grandeur when it comes to human beings.”

All were silent. People had begun showing each other mini holo’s of who this person in front of them was and the fear this understanding had caused showed in families with children carefully removing themselves from the place, but people being people, most of them had stayed.

“I stand here with one of the grandchildren of my best girl, my beloved Lucia, who was one of the thousands of individuals world-wide who went behind our backs back in the day. Discreetly and ingeniously laying the foundations for this administratively run world. Wonderfully hand-in-glove, so to speak, but a system which I loathe. I was not brought up to live like this. I was brought up to stand apart, to try to make more for me than others and to not grow a conscience. But I have. In the

last few years, I have.” He turned to smile at Raisie.

“My last stand will be to give the PDD this information. All the remaining rulers, such as myself and their closest hands,” he snapped up his screen and with quick fingertips commanded and swept a file out to all who were there.

“Check it now, and when you find it save and share it. This must happen swiftly. Let these people be identified, apprehended and stopped. Then there is the code which I give you here, Raisie.” He reached out, giving her a tiny, golden box, the size of a thumb nail, while he continuously kept addressing toward the cameras.

“It is of the utmost urgency for you to get it to your code experts immediately. We have sent urgent messages for such experts to be here. Are you?” Two people came rushing forward taking the gleaming container from Raisie.

“You do understand that you must open it with machines that are not connected to the net?” Both nodded eagerly as they spun around, rushing towards a van parked at the closest possible spot at the bottom of the slope.

Raisie hardly had time to process what was going on, but her brain was quick and she understood the outlines of it all. Why wouldn’t he have told her that this was his endgame? Did he need to atone and to receive her anger, all of humanity’s stored-up hatred? Well, he had got it all in her still-savored, well-landed punch crushing bones in his face. She silenced her brain and returned to be present in the moment.

He went on, now turning to her, and abruptly it was as if the two of them stood all alone on this spot.

“I began to waver in my determination when you were cured from cancer 25 years ago, Raisie. I have always followed you, you know. What happened then felt like a massive thump in my solar plexus. I then had to understand the reasons for the escalating, grazing second-guessing doubt I felt, which took more than two decades. I finally traced the steps back to how the cure for cancer had been reached so quickly after scientific research was freed from the monetary system. The old kind

of world that I was murdering to reinstate. Finally, I made the connection to all the geniuses and inventions that had been involved and how the explosion of science and development in all areas was possible *only as a result* of this new system. This had saved your life! I saw clearly how I and mine had kept so much expertise under lock and key, harnessing and never sharing the knowledge for the expansion and enrichment of humanity. That kind of rhetoric suddenly surfaced undisguised and I understood, for the first time, the tall tale of my kind being what led humanity forward. The rhetoric that I had been fed since infancy was pure hogwash! If I really had been interested in expansion and enriching the world I would have worked alongside Lucia a long, long time ago. I hadn't ever been interested in anything but lining my own pockets. The struggle I've had with admitting this. All these years of undermining progress. I just can't do it anymore. I am done! I can't stop hating your way of life, I was conditioned to do that, but I must admit defeat. This is my grand exit. This is my hat off to you. My rule is outdated and I feel too proud and bitter to join you. Even though I am like you."

She looked at him, or rather stared at him, with new eyes. There it was, a glimpse of a true leader. It had always been in there somewhere. He had always been a genius at what he did and, now, he had actually surpassed himself and managed to summon the courage to achieve honesty. For such a person to step into the light and admit the naked falseness of his inherited claims. That was the most hard-core humility she had ever encountered.

She still wanted to punish him, and she would, but this time within the measures of the law. She could see that he had actually done some inventorying of his learned beliefs and compared them with the results of this new system which had led him to see that it was giving everyone a proper chance of pursuing their dreams. She was in awe of his confessing to being a remnant of Homo sapiens' adolescent, ego-serving past.

She twitched back into the present when she noticed the compact silence around her and saw him staring at her. Now she could see the sadness, the lost but unforgiving realization that lurked behind those dark irises.

He gave her a small wink and a barely noticeable stretch of lips and she could see he was truly sincere. This was not the expression of the man drilled to lay on the mask of being a universal compatriot, concealing actual and completely alien core values. She looked at him with new eyes and again the feeling of seeing an old family friend surfaced within her.

“Yes” she said softly. “We are all human.”

At this his face contracted, his emotional facade dropping, his agony showing without filters, mirroring an inner pain, and he quickly turned back to the cameras. In a couple of seconds everything had changed. Was it even twenty minutes since they’d left the mobile home?

His voice boomed again over the ground of hardened lava.

“Embedded in there are also the countermeasures to stop this Trojan. The collapse of the internet as you know it is hanging in the balance. The havoc and chaos this attack would cause would definitely give opportunity for the remaining resistance to launch terrible bodily harm to a lot of people but also bring down many necessary systems in pure material form. I have realized that this would only be temporary harm. An attack such as this would not result in anything but savage murder and any attempts to restore the old world rule will not attract any new supporters, so the aim of this Reactionist effort is simply a complete waste. Humanity needs to keep moving forward. It is not turning back now. For me, personally, I just can’t live like this. This is not how I know how to interact with the world around me. I am extremely ashamed of the hate I feel for you, and for the Earth of this new era, but I deeply loathe it. My intellect and my emotions cannot coincide on this matter. I cannot make that change to my personality. And truly, I don’t want to. There is too strong an urge and pleasure when I contemplate my being in charge. Foremost, I relish holding others’ lives in my hands and living my own without compassion.”

A few people took angry steps toward him and in their eyes Raisie could see the losses their families had suffered. A flash went through her mind of the ancestral memory of generational torture and toil, inequity through measureless timespans. Of humanity having endured pointless and very real fear of death and impoverishment and, as always, forgetting that humanity itself had

chosen to endure under those kinds of magnates' and false idols' rule.

If they could have ripped him apart they would have, she had no doubt, but the PDD stepped in. Again she savored the feeling of that superbly landed crushing sensation, the painful physical harm she had caused his nose. She couldn't help it. For all of them and for her own pain, she would do it again!

"My reign is over and, sincerely, I applaud you. To be honest with you, Raisie, I think this is a fantastic world. I have sometimes, in very brief moments, allowed myself to fantasize about having been born into this. But, as it is now I'm just a bitter and vengeful old fart. Beyond my wildest fears I couldn't have dreamt that common workers could possess such intelligence as to achieve and retain such abundance. Beyond anything that I, and others brought up in the same manner, ever considered possible for other people. Thanks to the current levels of science I have gotten to live to see this most unexpected enormity of a human evolution. To our best efforts we tried to suffocate the internet and hinder the freeing up of education because of the power we suspected that we would lose over you. Far too late, though," he laughed and made a large sweep of his arm, in an including fashion.

"Now, I see that this was the only way for humankind to go forward and I want no part in it. Save yourselves, keep on this new path and remember people like me – remember what you never want to revert to. Remember to protect individual freedoms. And now, I will have mine. Free from the burden of being a false leader. From being charitable," he snorted, genuinely amused, "something which I never really was. A true leader is a servant, nothing less. Truly, I am sorry."

Faster than Raisie could react, the agile, old man swooped in between the bars of the fence behind him and before she could cry out, he jumped shouting like a schoolboy:

"Geronimo!" And then there was the thud.

His people were quick, but she was half a step behind them. She felt perplexed, infuriated, blaming, and yet shouting with a tone and in the voice of Lucia, not her own:

"Reinar!"

The two muscle men were skidding, followed by several PDD handlers, down a steep slope and she couldn't pinpoint the body at first. Then she saw him. One leg awfully skewed out of place, with the shin bone bloody and protruding through ripped flesh and skin. An arm pulled from its socket, laying limp but somehow still attached in an angle behind his head. Raisie's lenses focused in on the splayed body. Blood covering man and rock. And his nose, it was no longer there. The guilt at hitting him earlier tore itself loose from where she had attempted to bury it, thoughts echoing that this might not have happened had she not hurt him. Shame and nausea made her begin to turn away, but something caught her eye. He moved. He moved and then he screamed:

“Nooooooooo!”

THE WORLD MOVING ON

The bomb was never properly disarmed. Ray had only managed to halt the count down and the whole LD department had to be relocated. Arun used to say that the muscles he and the rest of the department got from laboring as movers for a month was a nice change to the usual yoga and swimming that they had been having as workplace exercise this past year. Not everyone agreed with his joyous reflections, but in the end it had brought everyone in the department much closer to one another.

How to best heal in the aftermath of the severe emotional effects which follow terrorist acts, even though this one never was fully carried out, was a treatment developed from horribly learned experience. Victims seemed to best work through the first period by letting those affected spend time talking and working closely together. Since there was a policy for administrative departments to share such labor as hygiene sanitation and relocation among all other physical chores in the workplace, this naturally fell within the individual therapeutic process.

Some personnel had to be temporarily relocated from other LDs in the region to keep the usual administrative tasks up and running, but mostly the whole society in the area pulled together and made the ongoing day-to-day life carry on as smoothly as could be expected.

Arun would have dreams for the rest of his life about those traumatic hours, but in comparison to the horrific millennia which most people had endured in the history of Homo sapiens, he deemed himself a very lucky and favored person. Especially since they had all survived.

The high-rise had to be demolished with explosives being placed so as to bring the whole building down. Ray's device, which turned out to have been an isolated act of treason toward humankind, detonated along with the rest in the blast.

In memory of those saved and in celebration of humanity's continued exponential discovery of itself and its potential, a huge climbing structure was raised on the site. The rubble was encased in a surface material of thick rubber covering the mound on which the structure was then raised. A 100 meters square and 25 meters at its highest height. Riddled with climbing walls and arches, all blended in natural colors.

Arun lay on his back, enjoying the sound of people of all ages whooping, clinging to ropes, doing Tarzan jumps. He watched as climbers were securing lines in moveable loops whilst struggling or generally just hanging around. The soul wounds were healing and time took its course.

Reinar lived on to see another day and watch his "betrayal" falling into rich soil. There had been only two others of his ilk still in active terrorist status, according to themselves and the scenes they caused at being revealed and captured. They and the others on "Reinar's List", as it had been named, had all been apprehended and would be spending their lives in rehabilitation villages spread across the globe.

Reinar and Angela enjoyed their gardens, met for small talk on the pathways, even though Angela was very disappointed in him and she told him that a lot. He took her scolding and regarded it as a part of the penance he was serving for all he'd done. His wounds never healed properly – there was only so much even modern medicine could alleviate. His prosthetic nose never attached properly

with the nerve endings and he, quite masochistically, sometimes just let it hurt like hell.

Ray hadn't forgiven himself or anybody else. Not yet. He hated and hated and hated. There was an empty, aching and gaping hole where he should have been, but love and hope never left his loved ones' hearts. Not for a single moment and they all let him know it by sending him notes and favorite snacks. And lots of films of Tinnie, growing, playing and learning. All they could do was hope that he watched them.

Arun, Raisie and their family and friends lived through the first hardships and became one with the agony, which would be their heritage from the traumatizing events of those critical two days.

The world was bettering itself, day by day. Love, tragedy, crime, addictions, discovery and competitions were still very much afoot. Humans will be humans and reign to see another day.

Arun lifted his face up at the shouting voice of Raisie trying to get the attention of their grandchildren. They were swinging and shrieking from a height that was not in their safety zone. He let go of his need to control the situation, breathing slowly in and out, letting Raisie save the day. Apparently she had that in her. He couldn't hinder the guffaw that exploded from his heart. Saving the world – that was her thing! He lay down again, flat on his back, zoned in on the high stalks surrounding him, grass and flowers swaying in the breeze, listening to the buzz and squawks of hundreds of flying creatures in the air, letting the swell of love for his world, the Earth, make his heart bulge. The warmth and awe he felt for the constant movement of life, of living, was on a throbbing spree throughout his body.

Somehow the world had become a safer place. Somehow his in-depth journey into the characteristics of being human, of being fierce and dependant, serene and independent, intolerant and benevolent, loving and envious, of all the parts of the deepest core functions of a human – of crashing horns head on with the magnificence and terror of his race, the Homo sapiens, had made him become more invested in life. More adventurous and determined in seeking out what really made him tick.

Thin layers of wispy cloud powdered the shifting blues of the sky. The absolute wonder of him

lying on his back on the surface of this globe, whirling through the universe, clinging magnetized to its star. The abundance and multitude of his home, his world was unfathomable in its splendid wealth. To think that not even today's tech had detected such marvel anywhere else in the known universe.

His mind searched inward to his imagination's creations of such galaxies where sparks could be a communicative family, or another where sparkling rays of fluorescence could be intelligence. What would they think of us? How would they interpret the maturity of a sentient race? Hopefully they too would have embarked upon responsibility. Hopefully they also held the evolution of all life in the highest regard so humanity wouldn't be threatened by exploitation or slave traders again. He drifted, following mind trails whispering of all sentient species being bound to their planet of origin until the race could love and respect itself as well as manage and be responsible for its native environment. Until behavioral patterns were integrated which ensured their ability to behave responsibly. A step which the human race had finally embarked on. In a few generations, individuals would probably be able to spontaneously act for bettering and furthering life. He smiled, turning his head a little to look at Simran, Emica and Laur who were chilling beside him on the enormous picnic blanket. A day in the park, healing with his friends and family. Could life be any richer than existing together like this?

He felt as if the warmth of a new sun ignited in slow motion, rays spreading inclusion outwards from deep inside. Love pulsating all the way from the core depths of his innermost chamber. He savored this fantastical exploration, this swinging over the steep cliffs of what it meant to be a person. Of this, so utterly aware, of being alive.

EPILOGUE

} Sitting in my older than old armchair. Feet up on the even older, mismatching foot stool. This is paradise! Today is the day the mansion opens up to the world and I've finally moved out. Along with a very few of my most treasured and needed stuff into this wonderful three-bedroom. It's so great to be here! I've been months organizing my too-well-filled childhood homes and grounds. Furniture has been relocated into offices, shopping malls, schools and daycare centers.

It is wonderful to see the wall-sized mirror from the entry hallway from the mansion being fitted into the playground of the daycare center right here, below my house. I have a splendid view of it from my balcony. I've had a big say in what becomes of the belongings, houses and grounds. Just as all estate owners do. Many have chosen to stay on but that was not for me. I need people and bustle around me, lots of inspiring events and activities. I'm a super happy camper!

The mirror was seven by seven meters where it hung in our main home's entrance hallway. Now it sits on the edge of the playground down there, quite near the edge of the woods. It's been rather refitted and mounted, folding over a beam, so that it's three-point-five meters in height and horizontally the length is an uncut seven. The beautifully carved wooden frame has been carefully preserved, and the whole mirror has been glossed over with some kind of protective and non-reflective security impregnation. The whole thing can apparently withstand all kinds of weather and even a stray croquet ball wouldn't crack it, they said. It's also blocking the sun's rays from reflecting and starting a fire. That would be a house-warming legacy. To burn down the whole borough!

During the day the mirror is adjustable. All day the children have worked together, huffing and puffing, pushing and nudging and, when needed, the teachers have helped them with the remote control. The frame is fitted with ropes for climbing. While I was watching (which I did for several hours today) five kids were climbing while hooting and another ten or so were playing at my childhood favorite game of playing dress-up, roosting about, admiring their images and character-improvs in the mirror.

To see and hear the joy that the old mirror spread down there was yet another "little" thing about

this new world that makes my heart sing. I mean, instead of it hanging above everybody's heads, only to be gawked at by a few guests and never being used for what it was made for. At home it was only ever being taken for granted as a prized possession by our isolated, little family. Now it will bring group after group happiness, playfulness and self-awareness development.

Before the daycare closed for the day, the mirror was directed so that it reflected the woods and the lake beneath to the joy of passers-by on the pathway. Beautiful. Simply beautiful!

This borough is sprouting with activity. Working adults heading homewards from the offices installed in previous living apartments, now reshaped into wonderful airy offices. On the way home they pass by in loud flocks after picking up their children.

Residents are tending to the vast vegetable gardens outdoors all hours, when the weather allows, and during harsher seasons the temporary, well-functioning green houses are erected which make for gardening and growing crops all year round. Meadows have been raised where, until only a few decades ago, enormous areas of short-cropped lawns of grass were quite inexplicably, carefully and uselessly cultivated.

Cafés, municipal sports equipment and youth centers are packed with activity in every single corner and there seems to be everything the young and restless could ever want for. And if there isn't, there soon will be some dedicated soul offering a new trial venture or they will all head into the city for uninhibited fun.

I passed a new disco the other day at lunchtime, where all the guests wore headphones. It was a hilarious sight – people eating and dancing in complete silence, except for laughing their heads off. And, of course the stomping of feet. They must have been listening to the same music though because you could see them doing the rhythm and hearing some words slipping out while they were singing to the same lyrics. I truly love it here!

Sprinkled amongst all this busy living are the outlets for pre-ordered groceries which dot the wide streets on allotted spots for their colorful mega-trucks which are easily converted into checkouts as soon as they are parked. How absolutely bombastic this place is! I couldn't have imagined this in

a million years! I simply love, love, LOVE it!

To think that this society almost seamlessly suits the population so smoothly. The fears we used to have in the early committees haven't come to be. The worries that some professions wouldn't be sought after has proved to be unfounded. People still want to be nurses, teachers, nerds and administrators. Sanitary technicians get huge bonuses, but most workplaces share maintenance among all staff. Humanity is almost supernaturally fulfilling itself, filling in the gaps as we go, creating new professions and inventing machines that do the most amazing tasks.

To think I would live to see this. I'm actually shedding tears right now. Grateful and relieved floods of tears! We are making this happen! These years of dedication have resulted in a world I couldn't have imagined in my wildest visions or hopes.

I am not letting Angela's outbursts spoil my joy. I will keep my sense of connectivity to humankind's evolution intact. I have a right to celebrate and experience this journey into our species' maturity. I'm fed up with pampering her. She's an adult now, at least according to the old measurements based on age. I have to stand strong in my decision to not have any contact with her as long as she acts out with such terribly destructive behaviors. It hurts like hell, but I am allowed to enjoy my life and so I will!

Well, anyways, back to the now. I'm meeting old friends later. We're dining on the new roof-top place, a few buildings down from me. I definitely won't be alone or isolated here. Ever. Lots of my friends have come to move here, which is why I chose this part of town in the first place.

I've already signed up for helping out at events in the neighborhood. Helping out at school gatherings mostly. Next week for example, I'll be preparing the cold and hot drinks, serving snacks, washing up and being of any general use during two evenings at the local high school. The administration and older pupils are planning for the upcoming term and a trip where they and their teachers will be taking the Tube to Paris. I've been listening in on them when they've discussed the sites and I'm looking forward to watching the films from what they will have done while visiting there. Paris is such a beautiful city. I might go soon. When all this moving in is done and I've

settled in properly.

The Tube is such a nice way to travel! I remember when the same journey would have taken six times longer. Not to mention how it's free so that anyone can go. As long as you've got the time saved up, made your booking for the journey and board in advance.

When I was a child we had people working for us who might have been able to afford one recreational journey per year. Tops. Even though it's merely a generation away, it already seems so unnatural for people to have been so restricted, despite working so hard. Even people with larger pay checks were forced to work terrible hours in understaffed workplaces. Many well-paid people worked two or three people's jobs.

Those were stressful days indeed. I can't even begin to fathom what the everyday world looked like for most people. Thinking about how the world is developing today, all the efforts we put in during the first reformation years make those huge efforts and the "sacrifices" more than worth it.

So, time to get ready for dinner. It's going to be so great meeting so many old and, even, some new friends. It will be wonderful to see them all. Even Reinart is coming! It's been a long, long while since I spent quality time with him. I hope he's well. We've discussed bringing him on board. His genius has always impressed me. People like him are absolutely indispensable for successfully forging a solid platform. His expertise at discerning talent and managing huge manufacturing and organisational matters would be a huge asset. Reinart has the capacity to discern what needs to be done. I'm so hoping that he will join a task force!

Ever since we were small I've always had warm feelings for him. What this evening will bring, no one knows, but I can honestly say that I'm feeling very excited and tingly about seeing him again. The amazing force of invisible ties that lie in the strong bonds of attraction between people.

I'm so nervous – but really Lucia, what could ever go wrong?

Let's get out there and be the storm to break all barriers! ~